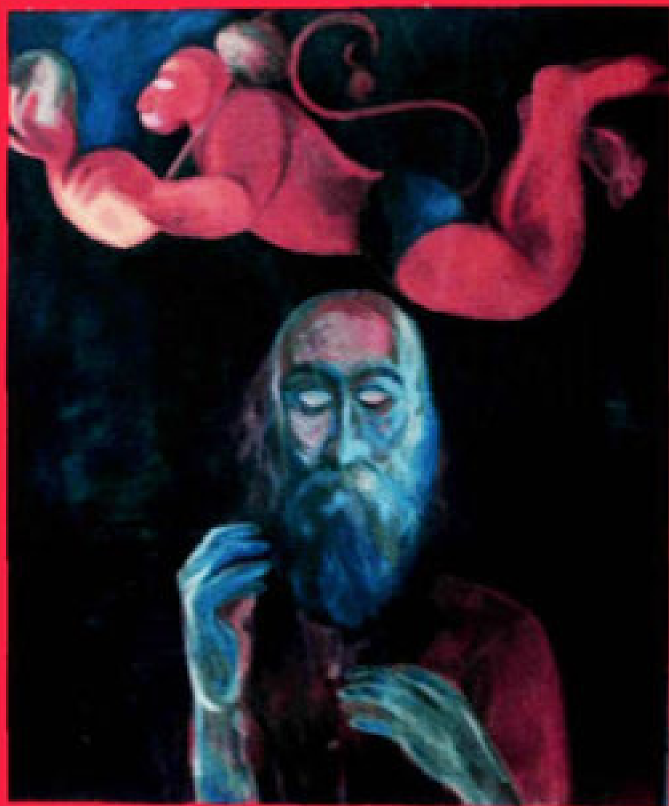


DINANATH PATHY

DRAWING MASTER OF DIGAPAHANDI

What makes this book significant is the efficacy of unraveling the multiple facets of a living culture that have gone deep into the shaping of an artistic vision. Pathy's artistic vision is eager to accept things as they are, life as it is. An ecstatic sense of place, an irrepressible desire to clutch and cling to the lost dimension of blood, an irresistible frankness to depict penury, hypocrisy and selfishness as confronted in the living movement of life, an unalloyed ironic stance, an amazing sense of humour, and above all an all-comprehensible human element make Dr. Pathy's book an unique contribution to the Contemporary Oriya Literature.

Like Tagore, he perhaps honestly believes in "Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies". Pathy does not risk telling cock-and-bull stories. Most unassumingly, without any air, Pathy unfolds the pages of his own life — a life that one would love to emulate.

Dr. Niranjan Mohanty

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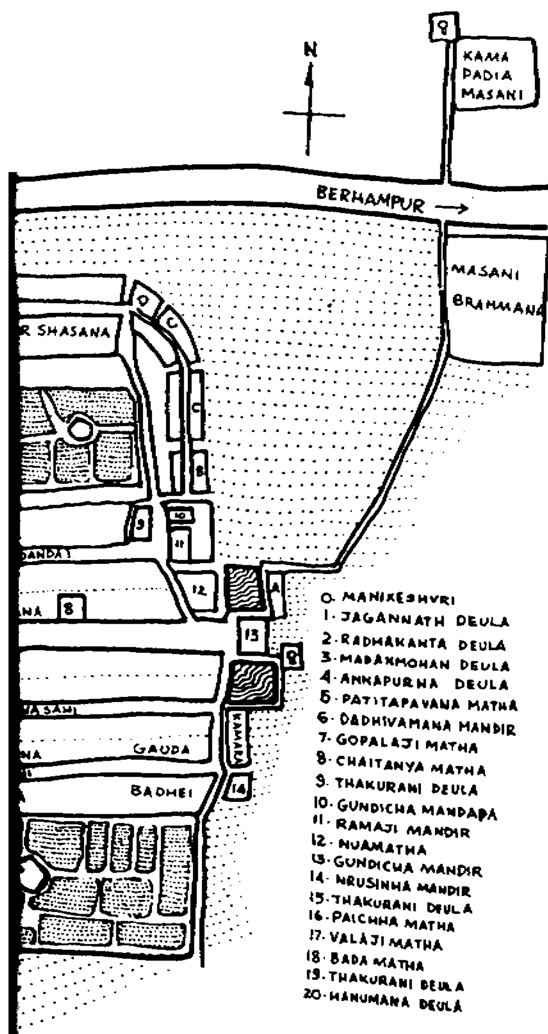
bila, Felder

bada, Garten

bandha, Teiche

matha, Tempelheime

siva mandira, Siva-Tempel



36 Stadtplan von Digapahandi (Ganjam-D)

A *mochi sahi*, Schusterstrasse
B *kumbhara sahi*, Topferstrasse
C *bauri sahi*, Feldarbeiterstrasse
D *patana ghara*, Hauser der Schlachter

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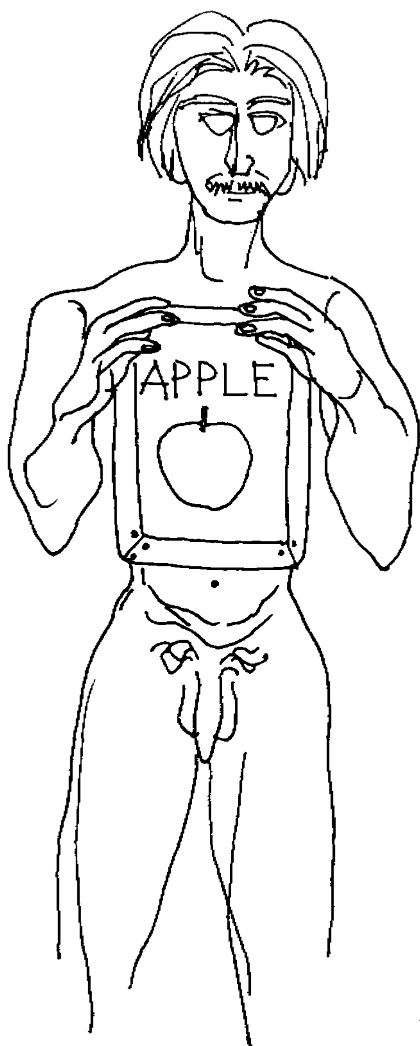
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Father and Mother
Uncles, Cousins,
Aunts, Nieces,
Friends, Relations
and
those who have
seen the
Drawing Master
naked


APPLE

Contents

THE VILLAGE

"Digapahandi, where horizons are lost
And darkness engulfs the day
Why ask me my whereabouts?
It is a jungle where I stay."

This is Digapahandi. I belong to this place. The fictive and lyrical Digapahandi of my father's unalloyed dream does not exist. The village in the bright shower of electricity looks very ordinary and hackneyed, shrinking back with an unknowable shame. Both my father and mother died long ago. The ancestral home has withered into a homestead. My elder brother stays in Berhampur these days. Almost none of my childhood companions is left here. They are busy elsewhere, trying to survive. And those who still live in the village have become fossils. At times I come to Digapahandi on official tours. But rarely do I step into my village. Digapahandi has become an insignia of my lost childhood. Or else, at least, testimony to my permanent address.

Almost four centuries ago the kings of the Ganga dynasty ruled over here. Some christened it Badakhemandi, Khemandi *Gada* or some even erred in calling it a Khemandi fort. Barring the long boundary wall round the palace, there is neither the huge fence or wall nor any moat circumscribing the village to justify it as a fort. Historians say that the heirs of the Ganga kings went to Paralakhemandi via Badakhemandi, and they consolidated themselves in the Vijayanagar *Gada* near Digapahandi. Afterwards, they settled in Digapahandi. They left the remnants of their past glory at Vijayanagar *Gada*. It lies submerged in the water reservoir of the Ghodahada river. Listening to the stories told by the old men and women of my village, I could recollect the three generations of rulers. Ramachandra Dev and his father



Krupamaya Dev and his father Lakshmi Narayan Dev are still talked about by the villagers. I have the good luck of seeing Ramachandra Dev in person. And almost in every house and shop of my village Krupamaya Dev's photograph is still hung. He was well-built. His arms were as strong as Lord Jagannatha's. A pair of twisted and coiled moustaches hung between the puffed cheeks exactly like Hiranya's in the Prahallada Nataka. Almost forty to fifty years hence, Ramachandra Dev had settled in Berhampur, deserting Digapahandi. Only very recently he died. Before he finally left Digapahandi, Ramachandra Dev demolished the palace with the help of the villagers. He was convinced that the people of Digapahandi conspired to bring about devastation to his family. Much before he abandoned the palace, Ramachandra Dev wanted to build a flyover to his Queen's chamber like the China Wall. But his plan did not materialise. After the royal family, it is their presiding deity Lord Jagannatha who is found living there amid such rank desertion.

The family Goddess Manikesvari's portable image was taken away by the priests to the nearby Annapurna lane. But the original golden idol of Manikesvari is still being worshipped in the King's palace at Berhampur. The fanfare within the precincts of the palace remains empty.

Entering the ghostly palace appearing as a forbidding haunted mansion was easy during the car festival in the rainy season. Of course, during other times, my friends and I could crawl in through the watergate of the main entrance for our archaeological discoveries of the dilapidated antique palace. The lofty brooding trees with massive crowns within the palace, the unkempt scrub jungle, the heaps of broken bricks and rocks, created such an eerie atmosphere that I never could venture to go in alone. It seems as though many glorious sagas of the Ganga dynasty have been buried in these ruins. With that, had also collapsed the royal pretensions. Destiny has certainly dealt a cruel blow, but the memories still oozing out of the ruins also mock at destiny. Sometimes I feel, as if Krupamaya Dev is staring at me, from his photo frame. Whenever I listen to often exaggerated tales about the palace, my heart reaches out to the core of the palace. Some parts of the court hall and its exquisitely done frescoes, the beams, rafters, decorated wooden door frames, windows, the wooden pillars, the stucco work such as the auspicious pitchers overflowing with leaves, fishes, birds and animals intricately carved out of wood—all that could survive the vandalism and ravishment of time—become alive once again. Perhaps, here Krupamaya drank scented wines sitting on his golden throne. The pillar against which I leaned must have borne the weight of the eager Khemandi king awaiting his beloved queen.

I feel excited. My imagination extended far beyond. Suddenly the soft tinkle of the anklet bells flow out of the deserted palace or the lost melody of the Karnataka *sahanai* blossoms like a virgin. Here from the ruins of the palace when I pick up a straw, I feel as if I have perhaps picked up a diamond. At times my friends and I used to bring away small bricks, tiles, strips of silver and copper from the gilded rafters and doors. Yes, you can very

well call us thieves. But frankly speaking, I continue to do so, even now. Why me alone, many of my friends in the Department of Culture do the same often. When they find a piece of carved stone or a broken terracotta pot, they carefully pick them up and place them in their drawing rooms or museums. This is now described as the archaeological awareness of a culturally committed person. Many bundles of single-side-typed papers, which I had stolen from my village palace, helped me in my school days with raw material for making out rough notes. But when I discovered from these typed pages that the white Sahebs were responsible for the downfall of the powerful kings of the Ganga dynasty and that the whites were instrumental in their degradation and being reduced to the status of mere zamindars, my mind often got agitated; I often felt like revolting against the white Saheb who had snatched the traditional royal titles and made them pigmies. As I grew old, I could realise from history that these were kings of kings for us, but mere zamindars for the white-skinned British.

The huge marble bath was a sheer delight for all of us. If we use the language of tourism, it would better be termed as our destination. Our attempts to remove a plate from the bath failed like the efforts of the British to remove the huge stone slab carved with the images of the nine planets from the Sun temple of Konarka. Sitting on the smooth slate-like cool marble of the bath, many times I have tried to visualise the naked bodies of the kings, queens, princes and princesses enjoying their watersport in the great bath. In some lonesome moments I have even inhaled the fragrance of scents, turmeric sandalwood paste and aromatic resins from the now broken, abandoned and dry cistern. Impelled by a rare thirst to have such a royal and majestic bath, I have woven dreams in the galaxy of my mind. But in spite of my visits beyond the seas, to many countries and stay in several five-star hotels, I never could satiate my dream of having such a royal and secluded bath. Of course such baths are royal and majestic in every respect, yet they were not lonesome, not intimately lonesome.

The most attractive spot within the precincts of the palace was



Poili sahi (a street of maidservants). As in Bhubaneswar aerodrome, 'Bhubaneswar' is written distinctly with the raised cemented letters, similarly reliefed lime letters clearly exhibited the name of *Poili sahi*. Amid thick shades of lofty mango-groves and *baula* trees this abandoned *Poili sahi* sleeps infinitely shrouded in mystery and suspicion. This street once upon a time was vibrant with youthful and beautiful damsels. To appease and delight the king, the damsels of this street were busy in achieving excellence in conversation, attire, gait, and glance. When the king was overpowered by passion, at the end of the day, he used to depute a servant to the *Poili sahi*, who on the king's behalf used to present the king's choicest damsel with a flower as an offering to signal his willingness to spend the night with her. This was the royal way of wooing. Today the *Poili sahi* is in utter ruins. But the sign *"Poili sahi"* is the epitome of shame and hatred of a lost generation. In this deserted palace it still echoes the corrupted, dark and obscure tales of many virgins and unravished women.

While accompanying Eberhard Fischer, my friend from Switzerland, to my village from Bhubaneswar, I learnt, for the first time, that Digapahandi represents a typical traditional Oriya village. Like a village bride, it had failed to sensitise me.

Digapahandi is at the criss-cross of Berhampur-Paralakhemandi and Aska-Chikiti roads. A slim twig-like dusty lane stemming from the main Berhampur-Paralakhemandi road, reaches the far end of the village. The village is squarish. The Vaishnavite descendants of the Gangas did almost banish Lord Shiva and other Shakta deities from the village and deployed them as the sentinels at the entrance and exit of the village, and installed Radhakrishna, Gopinatha, Madanmohana and Dadhivamana in the centre of the village so that they could socialise with the people endearingly. Truly speaking, the king's deserted palace was the nerve-centre of the village. If one stands at the lion-gate, keeping the palace at the back, one discovers a wide road stretching eastward elongating up to *Adapaghara*. This wide avenue is known as *Badadanda*. In the month of *Asadha* (June/July) when the sky is laden with dark clouds, the chariot

of Lord Jagannatha is pulled here. In the month of *Aswina* (September-October) at the dead of night, the chariot of *Bali* (sacrifice) emerging from the palace is seen moving towards *Jagili sahi* (cow slaughters' street) at the vicinity of the *Neliabandha* (green pond).

It is believed that the *manda* (cakes) made from human blood and the mountain sized *liamua* (sweets) adorned the chariot as deities. On their crowns vermilion marks are made and they were covered with red silk cloths and china rose garlands. The naked *kondhs* of the nearby *Kerandimala* hills crowd there to drag the chariot through the wide avenue in the dead of night. In the night's ghostly and ghastly silence, they chant aloud: "O' King give us a male goat, give us our sacrificial animal." On recollecting the frightful scene in my imagination, a strange sensation spreads through my body making my blood freeze in the veins.

The *Adapa* house is almost like *Mausi Ma's* temple of Puri (where Lord Jagannatha makes a sojourn for nine days every year). On either side of the wide avenue, the streets run like the veins and veinlets of the body. Many types of people, of varying castes live in these streets which are named after them. The fourfold caste division has paved the way for a multi-caste system. My house is in the *Badabrahmana* street. Adjacent to this street is the *Sanabrahmana* street. It has been named so because of the habitation of non-Brahmins along with the Brahmins. Some even call it *Khandia sahi* (the crippled street) as the people could never rise fully to their expectations because of the insistent fire demolishing some houses every year. Then follows the heroic *Odiya sahi*. It is believed that people of this street assisted the kings in the battles. Among the inhabitants of this street, *Telugu Reddy* and *Odiya Pradhan* were famous. Almost all were cultivators. In one corner, three to four houses of the *Sundhis* (wine vendors) faced our house. Almost sixty per cent of its population used to drink at night and pass beside our house. While studying in higher classes in my school days, we often launched strikes in front of the ale-vendors' houses in order to prevent them from selling ale in the village. But we could not

succeed in our mission, because those who used to drink from them were our uncles, cousins, relations, our near and dear ones. They used to inspire us to launch strikes and when we were engrossed in such agitations, they used to slip out and drink in the backyards. Moreover, a few belonging to ale-vendors' families were studying with us. This inevitably became the main obstacle to our success. These boys never maintained a balance between a student's morality and familial profession. While returning from the ale-vendors, I've heard some people lecturing on highly philosophical subjects while passing our house. Two of my uncle's sons—Godabari *bhaina* and Hari *bhaina*—used to drink heavily.

Halting at our house in a totally drunken state, Godabari *bhaina* used to advise me to pursue my studies with all sincerity. He used to translate his advice into English. The foul smell of the country-liquor (produced from rotten watered-rice) along with the broken English words reached me. He used to persuade his own younger brother Harihar *bhaina* not to drink. It is recalled the statutory warning of the cigarette companies for the good health of people. Sometimes, during summer when the ale-vendors' houses catch fire, the people from the Fire Brigade wrongly pick up the pots of ale, thinking these to be pots full of water, and pour down the contents on to the fire and as a result instead of extinguishing the fire, they aggravate the flames. Since it is a scientific truth, I still remember that the ale helps in burning. Following the *Odiya sahi* lies the *Kama sahi* where *Telugu* Brahmins lived. In olden days these Brahmins served the kings as *dewans*. Behind the Kama *sahi*, there was *Karana sahi* and *Pandara sahi*. The inhabitants of *Karana sahi* were engaged in the king's court for the purpose of noting and drafting. The people of *Pandara sahi* were in charge of gardening and vegetation of the king's palace. In Kama *sahi* and *Pandara sahi*, lived the poets, artistes, painters and carpenters. The famous painter Prahallada Mohapatra belongs to this area. Within the boundary of the *Pandara* kitchen gardens, there was a huge community well. Out of fun, we used to say "Your face is like the rotten well of *Pandara* gardens." My mother used to send me to this *Pandara* gardens to

get *sak*, onion leaves and carrots. Frankly speaking, I could never discover the fresh *sak* (*Koshala* and *Leutia*) of *Pandara* gardens even in this new capital.

The inhabitants of *Paika sahi* behind the palace constituted the permanent soldiers of the king. Once they changed the play *Search for Sita* into a very unusual and funny incident. I will certainly mention this funny play in another context. Adjacent to *Paika sahi* was the *Dari sahi* (the street where prostitutes lived). They reared parrots, dogs and green *barakoli* (berries) in their houses and gardens. The women of this community were affectionate and amiable. We were so impressed by their behaviour that we used to call them "aunts." I often visited their houses to taste berries. Close by was the *Velama sahi* where Telugu farmers lived. The road facing this *sahi* was known as *Sanadanda* or the small avenue. At the crown of this avenue was the temple of the *Dadhivamana* and at the foothold, the temple of *Budhi Thakurani*, old village goddess, *Adapa ghara*, and Raghunathji's temple. The entire avenue got crowded and clamorous at the time of the car festival of Dahivamana. Beside Raghunathji's temple, the king's permanent theatre stage was in ruins. Now a few dilapidated lime plastered columns stare vacantly at the endless sky. Close to *Velama sahi*, there was *Telugu Golla sahi*, whose inhabitants lived on rearing goats and cattle. In front and a little beyond is the *Bauri sahi* (night watchers' street), *Mochi sahi* (cobblers' street), and *Kumbhar sahi* (potters' street). Gada Chaitanyapur Sasana was a little beyond. People say the Brahmins of this locality were the purest and the best. My intimate friend Dr. Nilakantha who has settled with his family in London belongs to this street. His elder brother, Dr. Chakrapani Mishra is at present a professor in O.U.A.T. (Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology), Bhubaneswar.

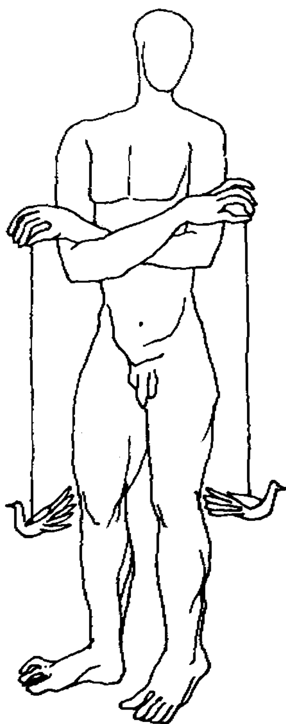
The village contains in all ten small and large ponds. On their banks were the temples of Lord Shiva and the village goddess. The largest pond is in close proximity to the king's palace. It looks like a lake and at its centre there was *Dipadandi* (central altar). During the king's heyday, the local deity Madanamohana used to visit this pond, particularly during *Chandan jatra*. The



quay in front of the king's *durbar* hall was known as *Paniduara*, or the watergate. I have heard about the king's lascivious and lustful eyes keeping a vigil on the bathing young girls and women of the village from the top of the *durbar* hall in the company of his ministers and royal staff. Many nameless tales relating to the king's enjoyment of the scene of young maidens' bathing have rocked my young tender heart. Although I never ventured to examine the veracity of such tales which have become legends now, I strongly felt that the king deliberately made the pond close to the court because of his strong secret passion. *Hatiganda* was very close to the watergate where once the king's elephant drowned. The king's quay was the best of all other quays for it was paved with stones well-designed and decorated two platforms on either side of the wide quay, bearing basil plants. One was meant for the male and the other for the female. Those in their advanced age used to offer their prayers for their sons and daughters, and those who were old enough

offered theirs for their grandsons and granddaughters. On one side there was the fenced narrow quay. All the villagers carried drinking water from here. On its left end, there was a fence wrought by concrete architraves. On top of the arched entrance of the fence there was an idol of *Vanadurga* seated on a lion, cast in concrete. On either side of the idol, there were marble slabs within ornate frames studded with leaden words which read like *Sri Sri Sri Viradhiviravara Navakoti Karnata Kalavargesvara Gajapati Goudesvara*, etc. Beyond the fence, was the temple of *Bhavakundalesvara* underneath a shady banyan tree. During summer days we used to swim in this huge pond. Hiring rubber tubes we floated and swam around the pond and sometimes we used to reach the central altar swimming in one breath and come back. That was great fun for us. Parents and guardians never appreciated such ventures; they treated these as wasteful and naughty. And for these, frequently I had to accept abuse and beatings from my elder brother. As I brood over such lost moments, I feel sad, deeply wounded. I always thought, "if at all, I could have swum a little longer." No, never shall I get the opportunity once again. Even after my departure from the village, the swimming experience on the huge pond left an indelible impression. These days when occasionally I visit my village, I miss the dancing, swaying colourful lilies of the pond. The villagers have become materialistic these days. They have made it a fishery unit. The crow-eyed water of the pond has forgotten the intimacy of the green algae and rocking water lilies because of the overwhelming fishy smell. These days, on moonlit nights when I visit the stone laid stairs, I feel, I am left with nothing but to fall back on bygone days and recount those memorable vistas of the past. Sitting on the stone paved stairs, I could still gather the glimpses of my dead uncles, cousins and brothers uttering *mantras* after their sacred bath, the *lota* of water gleaming in their hands. I could still recollect the sight of young women covering their faces with veils, returning homewards, a pitcher on their hips. Bathing, like white Saheb's lunch and dinner, was a luxury and a sign of sophistication for the villagers. From early dawn to sunrise, and then till the day brightened the

bathing continued, on some stairs or other. And while bathing, people continued to gossip about the king's reign and his philosophy. It is a day-dream now. The two vibrant outstretched arms of the huge pond which once dearly held the culture of a community are now tired and cold. They are immobile. Today those who consider themselves superior to their ancestors have ruined the magnanimity of the pond. They have converted a cultural nerve-centre into a mere rotting godown of fish.



THE HOUSE

Our house stood at one end of a bylane leading to the Brahmin street. A portion of our drooping thatched roof was cut to size as it obstructed the king's routine procession on his exquisitely adorned elephant. Our house had five rooms. Between the front block and the kitchen at the rear there was an open parlour. From here, all through the year, creepers of pumpkin and gourd elongated their necks over the kitchen roof. Every dawn and dusk the smoke from the hearth, where firewood was used as fuel, climbed over the tender tendrils of pumpkin and gourd to the rooftop. Beneath the slanted thatched roof was a flat ceiling that served as the store of a roofed house. All the doors were single. Those had tiny square compartments with carved lotus medallions at the centre. Above the door jambs, *Sakarapata* (concavely protruding wooden plate) had the carvings of the *Olatamachha* (inverted fish) and *Olatasua* (inverted parrot) with the *Purnakumbha* (brimming auspicious pitcher) in the centre. No windows in the rooms. I believe, this has a link with the tribal architectural tradition. The government constructed houses with well-ventilated windows for Juangas of Guptaganga and the Bayakumutia area of Keonjhar district. But closing down all the windows, they converted it into an eyeless chamber. Juangas believed that ghosts would rush in through the windows. In our windowless sleeping room there was a huge wooden, wheeled chest. Such chests are still in use in South Orissa today. The valuable articles of the household were preserved therein. The brass and bell-metal utensils my mother brought with her as a dowry were stuffed in the huge wooden chest. Another fascinating item of furniture is the *pidha* (small low wooden stool). Sitting on these tiny wooden frames, we as children used to eat our food. I distinctly remember the *khatuli* (wooden ritual tray) for our family deity. The wooden tray is carved and

designed intricately. It had four carved legs and at the back the carved-out format *Prabhavali*, with a pair of inverted parrots at the top. Orissan Ganesha, cast on molten brass, Mahishamardini Durga and two to four black *Salagram* stones were placed on the tray and were being worshipped. Once these much adored deities had to get burnt helplessly because of the fire that consumed the entire house. In those days in our house the use of cots, *Palanka*, mattresses and sophisticated bedcovers was not favoured. We made use of my mother's various multi-coloured *gantha* (quilts).

My mother was adept in sewing such quilts. As I grew up, I



learnt that Bengal was famous for such quilts. Now in aristrocratic and well-to-do houses, the Gujarati quilts serve as decorative pieces in the drawing rooms. If today Orissan quilts or quilts stitched by my mother could be preserved in a museum, I would have surely proved their superiority. For preparing quilts, often I helped my mother in keeping the sarees in order and sewing them. Each of my mother's needle stitches was so accurate, balanced and aesthetically pleasing that it helped create visual curiosity like a mosaic of patterns in today's optical art. My mother never did the preliminary layout of such quilts without my assistance. She had a feeling that with my personal touch, the quilts would become more exquisite, more meticulously designed. I assisted my mother in giving the first layout of the quilts. Although my mother used to draw beautiful *Jhoti* on the walls and floor during festivals and social functions, her quilts were the quintessences of her artistic and aesthetic expressions. Unconsciously perhaps, these quilts inspired me to paint.

We served as the king's physicians. I have heard that two horses were chained in front of our house. Perhaps, my forefathers used these two horses to reach the king's palace. I never had the opportunity to see these horses, except perhaps a cow and a calf. When I visited the king's stable, it was all empty—not a horse in it. The *Kelas* (gypsies) who used to live past our village had horses. I had occasion to see these horses. After viewing the drawings of Greek horses and horses in Rajput and Mughal miniatures, I feel that the horses I saw in Digapahandi were not worth their breed. My grandfather and granduncle Chaitanya Pathy were popularl known as *Vaidyaraja* (king of the physicians) and *Vaidyaratna* (gem of the physicians). My father never used such prefixes to his name. As I grew up, I remember, we were transformed from physicians to painters. But I have seen my great uncle's huge pots and pouches in which he used to prepare medicinal syrups and tablets, pressing herbs and roots into pastes. The flavour of these tablets was intoxicating. I feel, as though, the flavour is still in my nostrils. I have heard my parents say that I once did swallow ten to fifteen tablets at a time

when they were exposed to the sun on mats for the purpose of drying them. Everyone had a premonition that I would perhaps die. But I'm still alive on earth even today. Ours was the only house of the physicians in the village. With the changing times, the number of physicians increased, causing professional hazards to my great uncle. Recollecting this sad ebbing of time, once my father had composed a poem. I can still remember the fascinating lines of the poem:

There were only five physicians in our village,
Now they rose to twenty.
Knowing not the alphabets of *Ayurveda*
Many preserve books in their almirahs.
When the ants perforate the books,

They are as if text to them
Similarly they treat the patient.
Many choose this profession as a last refuge.
So, Padhi, the king of physicians.
A stick in hand and a betel pouch in his armpits
Moves from village to village to toil hard and manage his family.

My mother, Kamala Devi, my father Shyama Sunder Pathy, my elder brother Lokanatha Pathy, and my granny constituted our family. My father looked like a Greek marble figure. Tall, bald headed, white-bearded, strongly-built, a very unassuming personality. He combined within himself two extreme qualities: he was quite adventurous and indomitable, and extremely friendly and amiable. A man with almost infinite dreams woven in his eyes, moody and whimsical. Most of his wakeful moments were spent outside the house. I inherit this bad habit. My mother, shorter than my father, looked like a figure in an Odissi painting. Using all traditional ornaments, she resembled the "Village Bride" of Bimbadhar Varma.

At the square-crossing of *Punjikayan* we had a mango-grove adjoining the huge pond. A host of plants—both of fruits and flowers—enriched our grove. Amid the shady seclusion was the tiny temple of Trinath. Even though the temple was named after Trinatha, the presiding deity was Hanuman.



The idol was hip-high relief carved out of stone, with meticulous details on it. It has turned red because of constant application of vermilion, ghee and other incense. Close to this idol were the *Pata* paintings of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvar. Every Sunday, Trinath *mela* used to be held here. Betel leaf, betel-nut and *ganja* studded in a *kahali* (conical brass pipe) were offered to the deity. The songs relating to the worship of the deity were sung. Intermittently the awed devotees made the air clamorous with *'Haribol' 'Haribol'* (Hari being the name of the Lord, the creator). The grove of *Punjikayan* became vibrant with songs and rhythmic utterance of *'Haribol'*. In spite of the fear of tigers and bears, devotees from various parts of the village

would gather there. All shared the consecrated *ganja* at the end of the ritual. I have watched the devotees inhaling the *ganja* smoke from the terracotta pipe and releasing it with circles and semi-circles that curled up in the air. In the darkness, the fire from the terracotta pipe when inhaled, brightened like the signal of the railway station. In the dim light of the lantern placed on the cemented altar of Trinatha temple, I saw the smoke curling up from my father's snow-white beard. Its consecrated flavour did fascinated me. But I never ventured to taste it because of the fear of my father.

This temple was my father's epicentre. He spent most of his waking hours here. He got immense delight in composing poems. After the rice was boiled, he got the big terracotta pots with layers of black to the cemented altar of the temple. He scribbled poems on these pots. Once the poems were remembered, he broke the pots and collected more of them to write upon. He never made use of any paper or pen for writing poems. Everyone in the village called him *Padhi mahaprabhu* (the way a respectable Brahmin is addressed). Whenever anyone enquired about his identity, he used to reply through his poem. The first section of this book opened with the poem once my father had written. When asked about the landed property and household, he replied using metaphors:

> Belly is the storehouse
> Body is the wardrobe

He was a witty poet. He could readily compose poems. He could sing it aloud. Various experiences in Digapahandi and the characters my father encountered in the village constituted the themes of his poems:

> O' Arjun driver
> Neither is there tyre nor oil
> Bright horses he did rear in the stable,
> without food, they left for heaven.
> A dwarfed elephant is chained,
> don't enquire anything more,
> I have built my abode in the jungle mere.

Ganapati, the cashier does not have money
Chandra Panda, the ranger has no firewood
nor bamboos.
Don't enquire about anything,
I have built my house in this jungle mere.

My father composed a humorous poem on our house:

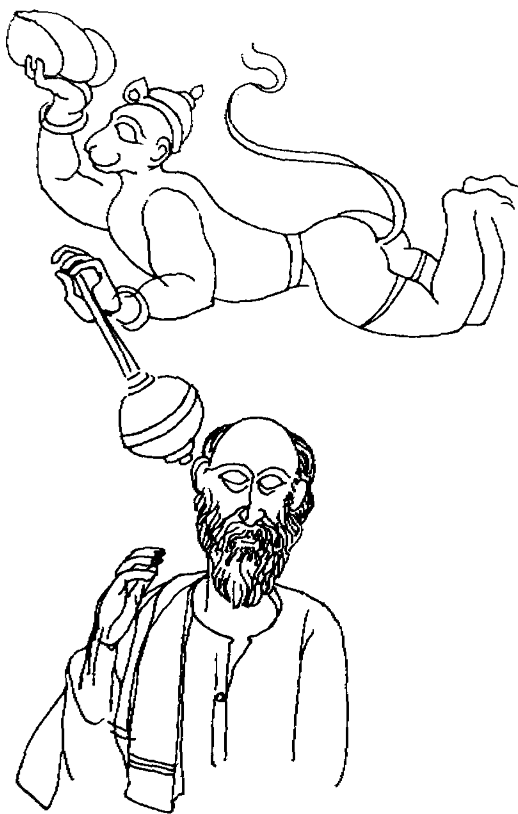
The roof has been swept away,
The moon and the sun play hide and seek.
Perhaps, this is the period of the Saturn.
O' save us O' Lord Dadhivamana.

If you don't come to our rescue
We'll loose this valued life.
When the barber's *dhenki* wooden thrasher
Falls with a heavy thud,
The walls go on trembling.
Where is my big packet of *ganja*,
The pipe has gone astray,
Seventy-year-old mother and the younger son (I)
cries aloud,
Save us O' Artatrana

In my school days when I needed clothes, my father used to take me to the shops. There he would delight the shop-owner with his instantly composed poems, witty, sharp, ready-made and humorous. The owner would be amused by his poems, and would spare us from paying any amount for my new outfit.

My father was rigorously punctual and very disciplined. Early in the dawn he would go out to *Punjikayan*, with an axe tied to his waist and a knife in his hand. Finishing his daily routine there, he would worship Lord Trinath and Lord Hanuman. On his way home, he would collect vegetables, fuel, and at times fish for the house. So we had no occasion to go to the market for vegetables. At 8.00 a.m., taking his lunch he would go to *Punjikayan* with his little tiffin shop. His eating habits and tastes were peculiar. He would make a mixture of rice, dal and curry in one deep-bellied bell-metal pot, and would finish it within three minutes. His argument was: all items get mixed up in the belly;

so, what's the harm if each item is mixed up before they are eaten. After his return from the day's business, he would attend to the domestic problems and would go to the market to fetch items already exhausted at home. Father used to get small change and coins after the day's business. It was really fascinating for me to count them and keep them in rows: ranging from rupees, eight annas, four annas, one anna, two-paise, and one paise coins with a hole in the centre. Father would not hesitate to pay an anna or two as remuneration for my labour. After his return from the market, he would wash his feet with warm water and would never go out again. He has never



appreciated the idea of maintaining the family by borrowing. He always advocated: "Cut your shirt according to cloth." When there was financial stringency, the entire family used to fast. But I have never seen him borrowing money from someone. My father was against the English language, use of full pants, and allopathic medicines. He coined a new word for pant. He called it a *Gandi muna* (purse for the buttocks). This is the reason he did not allow my brother to have his education in English. Had he been alive when I grew up, he would have restrained me from reading English. On his deathbed, he refused to take injections and any kind of modern medicine, and accepted death willingly. He was an extremely angry man by temperament. Any quarrel in the village stopped in his presence. He used to solve all the problems of the village. In summer when the houses accidentally caught fire, he would take the lead to extinguish the flames. Similarly in the *Jatras*, (festivals), if any problem arose, his presence would bring in an immediate solution. He would make himself available to the sessions of poetry recitation, to the places of merriment and fun. My father was a staunch devotee of Hanuman. He used to apply a vermilion mark above his left eyebrow on the forehead. He believed that Hanuman was extremely powerful and energetic. He was such a God that he never waited for priests to offer him the fruits; he would jump from one tree to another to collect his fruits as offerings of worship. The stone idol of Hanuman at *Punjikayan* was my father's presiding deity. Whereas the wooden images of Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesvar were constantly displaced because of the impact of the bears, the idol of Hanuman was installed in the temple intact and was worshipped. So my father had a strong conviction that none had the power to displace Hanuman. Hanuman was the source of my father's inspiration and strength, honesty and dedication. He could face the challenges of life because of Hanuman. At times when he fell ill, he did not entrust the worship to anyone, but to Hanuman himself.

Although my father was a staunch devotee of Hanuman, he got vexed at the strange behaviour of the bears who used to ransack the painted wooden images and spoil the mango grove

of *Punjikayan*. During the mango season, bears appear in large numbers, and they become wild. He must have killed at least twenty or thirty bears in the company of his forest-guard friend, Venkat Rao. He believed that the bear could only be attacked from the front, as it cannot distinctly view things and persons from close quarters. My father and his friend Venkat Rao hid huge pieces of stones in the mango trees to kill the bears. When the bear came to the foot of the tree to taste a mango, they threw huge pieces of stone at it, fracturing its backbone. The bear could move no more. Then it became very easy for them to kill the bear. There is still a novel way of bear-hunting. Secretly placing potash in the mangoes they would scatter these beneath the tree. The moment the bear would greedily pick up a mango it would burst in the mouth cavity, leading to its sudden collapse.

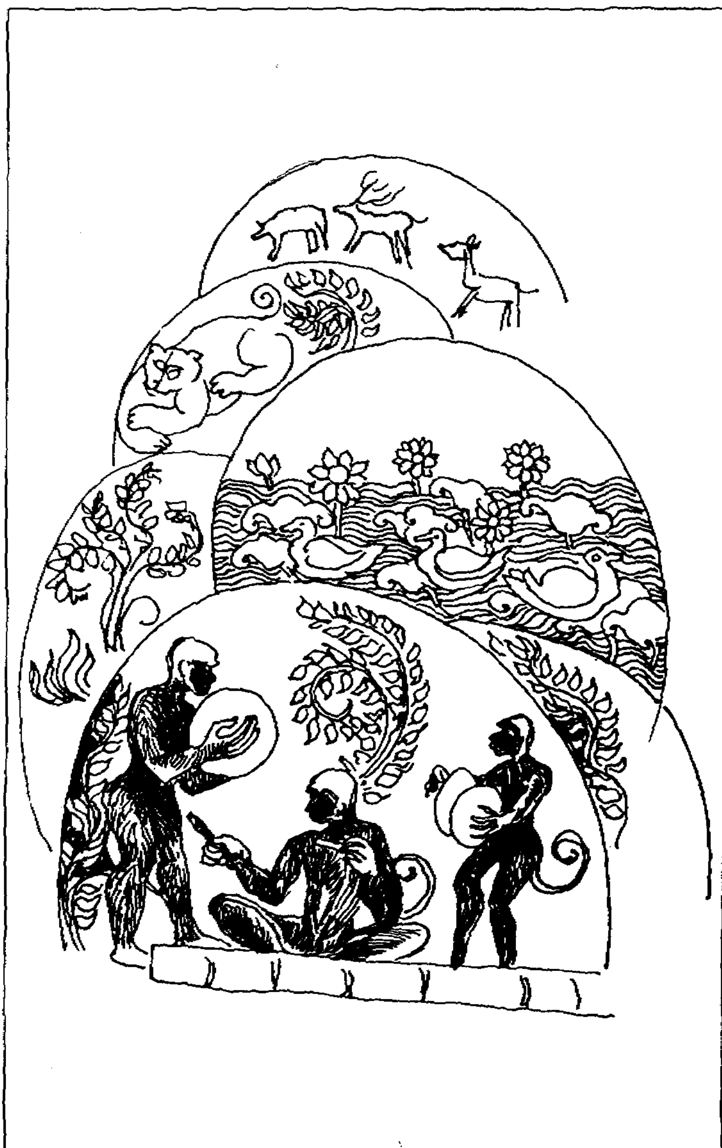
The King of Chikiti hunted many bears in an open jeep. My father used to help him. I accompanied my father in bear-hunting several times. It was not exactly for the bear-hunting. It was merely the compulsion of child-like innocence that impelled me to have a closer view of the bear. At first the bear moved, then my father followed by a few elderly men, and I, behind them all. I never knew that my father could run faster than me. The bear, like a black ball, was rolling across the bushes and fallow fields, and all of us, like Olympic players, were at it to hit. Such a sight made me speechless. My father was so engrossed in the hunt that he forgot about his youngest son whose plight was miserable in the battlefield sans food and clothing. An unknown fear swept over my body—and my body quivered. My feet halted. The sun was about to set. Before it was too late someone came to my rescue at my father's instance. Bears do not eat men. They wound us so frighteningly and mercilessly that survival becomes difficult. What the people in our village say *Chhodiva* even if it sounds vulgar in the Oriya language is true, that the bear ravishes us mercilessly. In my childhood I remember to have heard that the bear's saliva contains an acid that could perforate our body, and that it's tongue could function like a whetted saw. Using the support of the two hind legs, the bear can stand erect and with the help of two front legs it can tear the man from

crown to the feet as though it were forcibly unpacking the thatched roof. Now I realise that, had my father been alive, I would have requested him not to go bear-hunting. Once again, I think, where are those bears these days?

My father was not as rude to the monkeys as he was to the bears. They were exempted from punishment even if they spoiled the mango-grove. Perhaps he was reminded of his deity Hanuman. Had he remembered Jamvabana, these poor bears would have escaped his wrath. The forest and the environment of *Punjikayan* no longer exists. There is a great rush of cars, jeeps, trucks and buses as well as of huge crowds filling the area with noise day and night. Along with tiffin restaurants, cabins for selling *pan* (betel leaf) and a cinema hall have also come up. This is the first film hall of Digapahandi. Nowadays the night in *Punjikayan* resembles the day.

In summer buttermilk was offered to the thirsty in *Punjikayan*. My father was its chief organiser and distributor. About four to five large pots of buttermilk were consumed. The thirsty traveller used to drink the buttermilk punched with ginger, salt and the scent of lemon leaf to the full and quenched his thrist. During my summer vacations I used to go to *Punjikayan* and drank the buttermilk many times. Now when I pass this way, I remember my father. I felt as if he is sitting on the altar and smoking *ganja* or staring at a mango tree with his axe tucked in his waist.

My father was one of the renowned singers and instrument players of the *Dhumpa* group of our village. When there was no rain for days together, and the area would be experiencing severe drought, people of the *Dhumpa* group would congregate there on the top of *Changudidei* hill and conduct meetings and concerts to appease Indra, the God of Rain. People innocently believed that after such concerts, it would surely rain. This band of singers and musicians live in our village, even today. But they have lost their past glory. Now the band is known as *Vanyavaja dal* or forest concert troupe. About twenty-five to thirty people comprised the group. Some were adept singers, some were expert instrumentalists, and some of them were semi-singers accompanying the chorus. Sometimes the group could expand



and accommodate up to forty to fifty people. The main musical instrument of this concert was a hollow bamboo almost ten to fifteen feet long, which was beaten by sticks keeping rhythm with the song. The music that emerges from the instrument could be heard from a great distance. Hence there was no necessity of a mike or a loud speaker. The other instruments used were drum, *Mardala, Singa* (horn), *Suramardal* or lyre, *Jhanja* or tambourine, harmonium or *Dasakathi, Handi* (pitcher) *Ghungura* or violin, etc. They were played upon almost simultaneously. The songs of Upendra Bhanja and Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha were sung to the accompaniment of a *dhumpa*. The grave, sombre and brave minstrelsy of a *dhumpa* blew across the village of Digapahandi making it vibrant and buoyant. An unusual sensation used to spread through the village. Its echoes were heard in the *Changudidei* hills nearby. When I took up my research work on paintings, strangely I could discover the painting of a *dhumpa* on the wall of Viranchi Narayna temple at Buguda. On the wall of this temple, almost two centuries ago, the scene of the meeting of Bharata and Ramachandra in the deep forest was painted. The monkeys, on the arrival of King Bharata, must have played on the *dhumpa* to extend a hearty welcome to the King Bharata. It can therefore be presumed that not only in Digapahandi, but also in the entire Ganjam, the *dhumpa* was popular. After joining as the Curator of Art and Craft Department in the State Museum, Bhubaneswar, I preserved most of the instruments that the *dhumpa* group used. I could also preserve the *suramardal* my father used to play.

My elder brother became a painter under compulsion. We used to prepare everything—starting with *solapith* flowers to theatre curtains. My elder brother was the chief behind all these. He never had to take any formal training in an art college. In course of his practice he had acquired several technicalities of art. In our house, we had started an art institute named *Silpakala Mandir*. It undertook the painting of theatre curtains, the preparation of masks, crowns, headgear and various props for the theatre groups. It also repaired harmoniums, framed photographs, and bound books. I worked quite long as a junior

artist of this *mandir*. I correctly recollect that I became an artist of this sort while studying in the fifth class in my school. I was assisting my brother in decorating Orissa Road Transport (ORT) buses like peacocks and boats and processional chariots during *Dashara*. We used to move to villages to paint walls of *Oshakothi* shrines. During *Thakurani jatra* we used to paint people like tigers. On occasions of marriage ceremonies we painted walls with auspicious pitchers, inverted fishes, plantain plants or palanquins. In the *mathas* and temples we also used to draw murals. I extended my help to my brother in making signboards. My career as an artist began with trifling works like churning colours in the hard covers of coconut, preparing gum, and passing on the colour, brush, and water to senior artists. The first lessons on art I received from this *Silpakala Mandir*. My brother intelligently and meticulously fulfilled the demands of the villagers. Before conceptualisation of the *Silpakala Mandir*, my father, brother and I used to sell the dancing dolls, the painted clay toys, and *solapith* flowers in the *Dimbula Jatra*. Two months before the *jatra*, we would usually begin our work on the dancing dolls. There was ingenuity in the style of the making of these dancing dolls. If the drawing teachers these days train the students with this technique the students would be greatly benefitted. At first, the clay would be pressed to small rounds, which further would be rolled like thick wicks. When one end of this elongated wick would be raised by a finger it gave the impression of the neck of a peacock. And the tip of it when pressed by a finger, gave the impression of the beak. A pair of wings was made from the palm leaf which were then fitted on either side of body. On a plain piece of paper many parallel lines of multiple colours like in a rainbow were drawn. The paper was then folded like a folding hand-fan. It was then pressed to the back of the earthen trunk. When the clay was wet, a ring made from thin wire was fitted on the peacok's back. Almost a foot-long thin strip from the cycle tube was cut and then tied to the ring. It was then suspended from clothes-lines for drying in the sun. When the clay was moderately dry, the toys were dipped in black lac. It was required to hold the paper tail up while dipping

the toy in the molten lac. These toys after being dipped in lac looked like colourful porcelain toys and were quite attractive. Children were fascinated by these toys so much so that they sometimes cried to get them and there was competition in buying. My father used to call these toys *Pila kanda* (toys that make children cry). It cost then two paise only.

Along with the dancing toys, *Sevati* or jasmine buds, *Kadamva* or roses and the whirling flowers were also sold. The village women were eager to buy *Sevati*, jasmine and roses to decorate their chignons and to tuck into their plaits. Before these flowers reached the customers we used to sprinkle scent. These flowers matched wonderfully the turmeric smeared cheeks and oily chignons and enhanced their aesthetic appeal. Now the plastic flowers have ousted the *solapith* ones and most of the women do not decorate their hair with flowers.

There is a specific technique to prepare *solapith* flowers. At the beginning, the long piths are cut into small pieces. Each piece is then cut with a sharp knife from outer surface to the inner core which eventually looks like a loosely rolled photo film. This is tightened by hand and its top portion is cut into different designs. The lower end is tied into a knot with the help of our sacred threads. When this knot is further tightened, the upper portion spreads out into the shape of a flower. Our sacred threads are not only used in our daily Brahmanic rituals, but work as a tool in *solapith* flower-making. Nowadays, no one prepares *solapith* flowers in our village. Such a sensitive handicraft is lost to the village tradition.

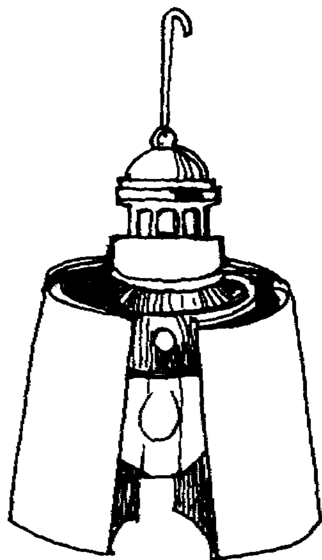
THE SILPAKALA MANDIR

My initial training as an artist started in the *Silpakala Mandir*. Besides my brother and I, other colleagues included were Natabara Martha, the drawing teacher of my village school, Kashinath Das, the drawing teacher of the school at Nuapada, in the vicinity of our village, and brother *Kanamana* alias Raghunath Patra of our street. There is something very peculiar and funny about brother *Kanamana's* nomenclature. He was named so because of the largeness of his ears and genitals. His funny naming did not create stir nor did it impel anyone to raise his eyebrows. Innocently and with all frankness, people called him *Kanamana* (ear-genital). Nomenclature-wise our village had half-a-dozen persons bearing the names frog, one dozen being called rat, and two or three bull. Frog Govinda alias Govinda Mishra, my father's intimate friend, and my father were the advisers of the *Silpakala Mandir*.

Although Lokanath *Bhaina* was the founder, manager and visualiser, it was *Kanamana Bhaina* who was the dexterous craftsman of the *Silpakala Mandir*. He never said 'No' to any of the Mandir's assignments. A tall gigantic personality, with furrowed eyes, distinct shoulder bones, and while walking, he drooped forward. He was the priest of *Budhi Thakurani* whose temple stood at the fag end of the *Sanadanda* (street). He begged *sitala* (alms) for the Goddess *Budhi Thakurani* roaming from one street to another. At his home, he prepared the *solapith* flowers. A rough *dhoti* hung above his knees. And when he visited other villages often he used a *kaba*, a hand-stitched half-sleeved banian with a front pocket. Whenever the members of our troupe were commissioned by other villages for theatre performances, arrangements were being made in the local schools, *mathas* or temples for our sojourn, for all of us were Brahmins. A cook

would be arranged for us or we were treated to the guest meals in a temple. *Kanamana Bhaina* was a voracious eater and he would not be content without consuming four or five meals. He initiated me into his principle. His principle, he used to argue, was: "The villagers (addressing them as brothers-in-law) do not pay the artists handsomely, so it is better to be a voracious eater." A competition in terms of eating went on between *Kanamana Bhaina* and myself. It was funny that at times we would both consume the entire store of the sweetmeat shop, if the theatre people did not make a bargain. *Kanamana Bhaina* used to even hide a dozen *puris* in the furrows of his shoulders. He would then cover his shoulders with his *Gamuchha* and return home.

Once we took an advance from the nearby village Gola Chudangapur for staging a drama. We took only Rs. 120. It is unbelievable now. We set out walking for Chudangapur. Ganesha *Bhaina* accompanied us as the light technician. He was the eldest son of my father's friend, Govinda Mishra. Like Kanishka Sen of Bengal, the light wizard of our village, could



make the hanging lights on and off placing a tin-cover on the petromax light. Of course, from the slit of the tin covers rays of light could travel into the stage. But the make-shift stage of Chudangapur was not like that of Rabindra Mandap of Bhubaneswar. His lapses were pardonable. At about 7.30 in the evening when our troupe arrived in the village, the characters of the play were yet to reach the stage after a day's hard toil in the field. The news of our arrival there in the village created a strange sensation. Children, men and women and almost everyone surrounded us. Without delay, *Kanamana Bhaina* began to dig the pit assisted by a group of young boys. Collecting three or four bamboo mats from the bullock carts, the height of the stage was set, filling it with earth. Almost in an hour, the stage was made ready. With the help of bamboo rafters and coconut branches, the roof was set in another hour. Under the supervision of my brother, the drop scene, the forest scene, etc. were hung. When the actors came to the stage, after their evening bath, it was almost 9 to 10 p.m. Then began the funny scene of shaving as in a death ritual one after the other. My brother started the make-up. The play *Sriya Chandaluni* was to be staged. *Kanamana Bhaina* and I set our hands at the making of a temple. *Kanamana Bhaina* split the bamboo and made a few long scraps out of it. He twisted them into a Roman arch. On these pieces, newspaper was pasted. A layer of lime was sprayed on it. He then asked me to paint the architectural features in ultramarine so as to give the structure the look of a temple. I painted the dance hall, the hall of offering, the porch, the sanctum-sanctorum, and the huge Meghanada compound wall—all superimposed within the narrow limits of the arch. In the middle of the arch, I made a small door-like opening through which appeared Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Because of their intense devotion to Lord Jagannatha, the shepherds of Chudangapur were elated and gratified. In the middle of the drama, *Kanamana Bhaina* removed the offering of *Sriya Chandaluni* from behind the facade of the arch through this tiny door. The air became clamorous with clapping. It was nine in the morning when the play was over. I must have given *Kanamana*

Bhaina my company in more than a hundred and fifty dramas. Natabara Martha and Kashinatha Das being government employees, could not give us company when the troupe visited beyond our village. So the major activities of the *Mandir* were confined to my elder brother, *Kanamana Bhaina* and myself.

The number of departments the *Silpakala Mandir* had retained, the Art College of Bhubaneswar does not have them even today. When any minister or any leader visited our village, welcome gates and arches out of thin bamboo scraps were made and installed. Throughout the night we used to cover these bamboo-scrap-woven sheets with newspaper pasted on it with flour gum. We would then paint several designs on it with ultramarine and red ochre colours. The welcome gates looked attractive with slogans of "the Arch Vidyaratna named after a medieval poet of our village" or "Let the Ghodahada Dam Project be installed," or with "Let the Bahuda Project be initiated." During the elections we prepared placards in good numbers using labels, "Cast your vote in the yellow box" or "Cast your vote in the box bearing the symbol of a pair of bullocks." Once in our village we had the Panchayat election. Apna Raju left his order with *Silpakala Mandir* to provide him with posters. We had then begun preparing posters by stencils. The first line of the poster retained the name of the candidate: "To Apna Raju", and just below it was the picture of a cycle and below it the other line "Cast your vote." Just before Apna Raju's name there was B and I forgot to give the stop after B in the stencil. As a result, in the vernacular, when all the letters were read in one breath it was vulgar and people made a lot of fun as a result of my mistake. In fact, I ran down with shame for being so careless. (*Bia* in vernacular was vagina. And people read B. Apana Raju's name with such vulgarity because of the absence of the full stop.). But I do not feel shy these days when I paint nude pictures of men and women. My paintings get exhibited at many places. Neither the viewers nor I feel ashamed of such nudity or vulgarity. I have grown tolerant to all these.

Once my elder brother thought of a mouse that was needed for the Prahallada Natak. In this play in the beginning Ganesha

appears when prayers were sung in his praise. He holds his elephant mask in the left hand covering his face and enters the stage. My brother thought he would make Ganesha enter the



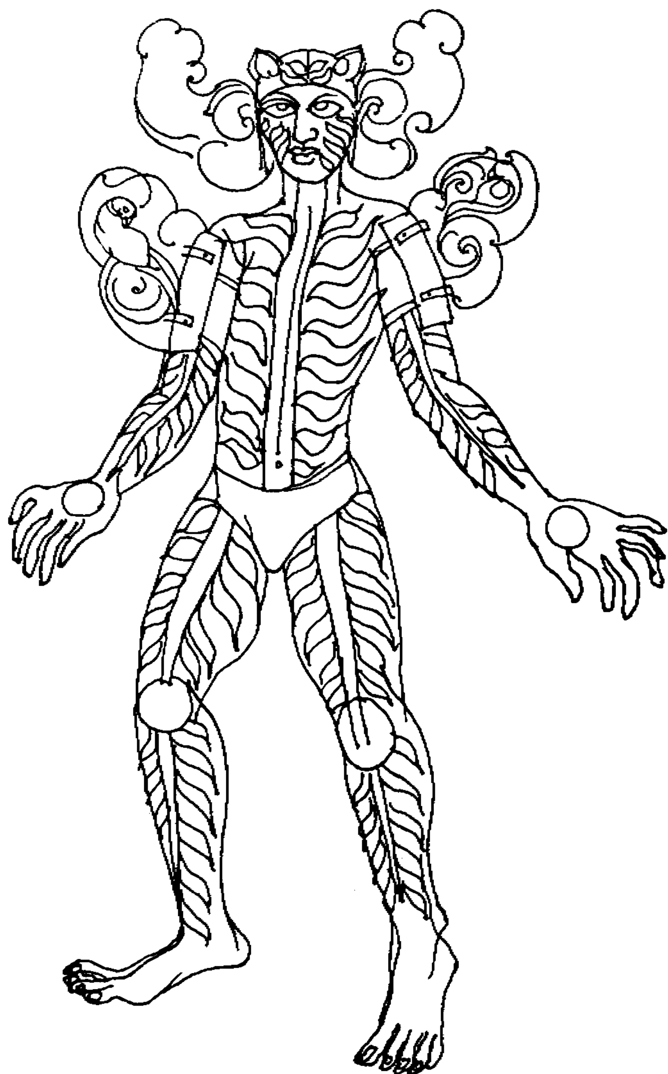
stage on his vehicle-mouse. No wonder the mouse could be smaller in a painting or sculpture, but when a human character physically entered the stage dancing, he must arrive on a huge mouse. So he made a three feet high mouse, and placed it on a wheeled base. The theatre people accepted this mouse with much persuasion by my brother. When the elephant-headed Lord Ganesha entered the stage on the mouse it made a funny show, for the mouse looked more like a wild pig than a mouse. The audience protested so the mouse was removed from the stage. It was brought back to our house. My brother's daughters turned it into a toy.

There was another memorable incident in which we made a relief image of Lord Ganesha using clay. My brother thought of a plan that the seeds of various types could be used on the relief.

Collecting black gram, green gram, nuts, mustard, and paddy from the nearby shop we pasted these on the body of the idol. These days we call this technique collage. After a day or two it was observed that the seeds did germinate and the body of the idol did crack. My brother could only then realise his mistake. Long after this incident, Ashim da and I had been to Delhi to participate in the Agri-Expo-77. Using seeds, we made the idol of Lord Balabhadra. But this time we did not use wet clay as the base. Instead, we fixed the seeds on a wooden plate using fevicol. While busy in preparing this collage, at once I recollected the relief idol of Lord Ganesha of the *Silpakala Mandir*.

Among the orders we used to receive at the *Silpakala Mandir*, the most adventurous and prized work was the preparation of the articles necessary for the tiger-dance. The mask, the gill and the armlets were prepared out of papier mache moulds and tinsheets. The mask was exactly like a cap. The face portion was left open while the back was covered. On the skull there were a pair of ears, and behind the cap, the painting of a tiger's face. When the gills are fitted to the face, they stand erect on either side of the cheek and give the look of a *Prabha*.

After levelling the kerosene tin, the drawings were stencilled cut to the design of the gill. Then the motifs of tiger, lion, elephant, hunter with gun fairies and creepers are painted with varnish colour on either side of the gill. On the day of the tiger-dance, a man carrying the mask, the gill, and the armlet tied to the top of a long bamboo, accompanied by a drummer goes to the temple of the village Goddess. A minor procession carrying the props of the tiger dance, from the *Silpakala Mandir* would move towards the temple. On that evening I accompanied *Bhaina* for the make up of the man as tiger. If there were more than two tigers to be painted, both brothers would share our responsibilities. The painting of a tiger has a speciality of its own. One who would become the tiger is cleanly shaved except at the head. In the village *Akhada* (community hall) the make up of the tiger begins. The tiger sits on a stool wearing a small *dhoti* with a fold hooked at the back-waist. He places his hands straight on two friends' shoulders. A red strip is drawn from below his eyes



to the tip of the hooked *dhoti* covering the mouth, neck, chest and navel. Another red strip is drawn from the tip of the backbone to his waist. On the elbows, knee caps, palms, and feet white globe-like shapes are drawn. The rest of the body is given two or three coatings of chrome yellow varnish paint, on which stripes and ornate motifs were drawn. After the varnish paint, the skin becomes tense and the body begins to burn. In order to give relief, people offer him country liquor. In front of our eyes, the tiger drinks glass after glass, his eyes assuming the colour of the varnish. In the precincts of the *Akhada*, slowly people throng. Three or four petromax lights make the atmosphere of the room warm. Four or five organisers begin to fan the sizzling tiger. A gust of wind out of their fanning relieves us. When the yellow colour dries up, we used to paint the black stripes carefully on the back, thighs, and muscles of the legs. A few proportionate stripes are drawn on his hands too. In order to make these stripes more distinct and attractive, we decorate the sides and use *chumuki* (sparkling tinsel). In order to give the stripes a uniform look, we use stencils made from tin. Painting the tiger takes four to five hours. The wild clamour, scent of the country liqour, the clumsy, dirty, sweaty smell of the viewers' dress, coupled with the scent of kerosene from the petromax light and that of varnish transform the room into a tiger's den. I get the feeling that it is for our livelihood only that we two brothers stand helplessly before the tiger. And the tiger with all kindness growling at us, humbly assuming that we were his creator.

After paying a visit to the local village Goddess, the tiger performs his maiden dance in front of the *Silpakala Mandir*. The founding father and the junior artists of the *Silpakala Mandir* feel elated. Organisers of the tiger dance hidden from the crowd pay my brother a ten-rupee note in advance to present it to the tiger. When the tiger's dance comes to an end, my brother, amid the crowded viewers comes forward and pins the ten-rupee note to the gills of the tiger. Perhaps, this act is an indication to the viewers of the sound financial status of the *Silpakala Mandir*.

Amid many other ingenious artistic ideas, my brother's invention of the magic lantern was unique and original. Of

course, my brother's name does not figure in the list of inventors. But it can be said with all pride that in a small village like Digapahandi and in a very poor family, an artist, before knowing about the magic lantern or seeing it, could venture to dream of such an instrument and in fact, he could prepare the one in his own rustic, discursive way.

Bhaina, Natabar Martha, the drawing teacher of our village school, and myself could prepare a magic lantern without using scientific instruments. On the breadth-side of a tea-packing-box, we made a circular hole and put a long tube of tin. On both ends of this tube, two lenses were fitted. A two-tier wooden ladder was kept inside the tea-packing-box close to the tube. The glass slides were inserted into the grove of the two-tier wooden ladder.

My brother fitted it on a wooden box with the help of nuts and bolts, and wires. He made it look like an intricate machine for the simple reason that it would be taken to many villages. It was finally covered by a black linen, as though a field camera. In the absence of electricity, a petromax light was placed inside the magic lantern. Intermittently the petromax was removed lest it might cause fire in the tea packing box. My elder brother being defensive used to explain to the villagers that the machine might be getting heated. Readers may laugh at our selfish lies. Those who travel by Indian Airlines come across the term "technical defects." In order to retain the prestige of the magic lantern and to popularise its recondite sophistication in the village, we had to invent such coinages. More often, the performance of *jatras* were governed by a competitive spirit. The magic lantern, like Krishna's decisive role in the *Mahabharata* contributed greatly to the victory of a party. It was because of this magic lantern, that the *Silpakala Mandir* in Ganjam was heavily in demand.

The *Silpakala Mandir* had an orientation of a rural cottage industry; moreover, our financial backbone was not quite strong. So, when we used to carry the magic lantern out of our *Mandir,* we had to be very cautious. *Bhaina* used to remove the lense-fitted long tin-tube and keep it in the womb of the lantern box. The box, after being covered by a coarse towel, gave the look of

a bale. Arriving at the threshold of the village, we used to bring the lantern to its original shape. The more we came closer to the village, the more the children and old men and women began to throng. It seemed, as if, some procession was out in the village. The chief architect of the procession was *Bhaina* and behind him, I carrying the magic lantern on my head. I felt elated then, thinking as if, this machine had brought the revolutionising message of an industrial civilisation. The village got stirred with the news that the cinema had come to their village. By the time we reached either a club or the residence of the village chief, we observed that all the villagers had surrounded us with eagerness. The lantern was perhaps more fortunate than we two brothers, for my brother would order a table or cot. The lantern was first given its status. Then the room was locked.

After a day or two, when we left the village, people render a colourful adieu. The children and the leaders of the theatre group would invariably accompany us up to the fag end of the village. They would present us rice, black gram, green grams and coconuts collected from the village as a token of our honorarium. With the excuse of attending to the call of nature, we would leave the villagers. Once again, removing the aristocratic lense and tube from the lantern, we inserted all our earnings. Wrapping it with the coarse towel we came back to our village.

Usually two types of slides are shown with the help of the magic lantern. The first type of slides are the cast announcing the characters and the organisers of the play, and the second one included some mythical pictures related or unrelated to the play. Casting slides created a sense of success and glory amongst the young men and the organisers of the village. The mythical slides attracted the old men and women alike and aroused a religious and pious feeling in them, signs of contentment and joy reflected in their faces. So the magic lantern became very dear to the villagers and I was much in demand as its operator. No one important enough in the village is omitted when we write the castings on the slide: the patron, the director, organiser, managing director, the decorators, the stage managers, make up men, music director, instrumentalists, all figure on the slides. I

too like to see my name projected on the white screen: "Slides by Dinanath Pathy, *Shilpakala Mandir*, Digapahandi." I drew the mythical pictures on the slides, imitating the pictures published in the book from Gita Bhavan. Pictures from *Dasavatara*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata* were shown in every play. The crowds in those days were more than that we have today before the TV when it serialises the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*.

The scope of activities of the *Shilpakala Mandir* was wide-ranging. In southern Ganjam it had earned fame and familiarity. *Bhaina* printed a pamphlet on the *Shilpakala Mandir* in Berhampur.

This pamphlet or what is known today as the business profile contained the portrait of Lokanath *Bhaina*. The portrait printed from half tone was smudgy and gave the look of an oval shaped abstract motif. Besides, it contained information on the activities of the *Shilpakala Mandir*, and on the grand art tradition of Orissa. *Bhaina* was the main architect of our *Mandir*. He used to say that the *Shilpakala Mandir* performed all types of activities from grass cutting to horse-riding and book-binding, photo-framing, sign painting, repair of harmonium, papier mache masks, costumes for plays, *solapith* flowers, theatre screens, light decorations, photography, oil painting, pencil portraits, cement statues, and such items related to the performing arts were taken care of in the *Shipakala Mandir*. Situated in the corner of our village, the front room of our house and the verandah constituted the reception room of the *Mandir* and the main studio of the visualiser. That is why the so-called sensitive people of our village often crowded our house. *Bhaina* was extremely talkative, and I was no less. So we welcomed them. These culturally, oriented people depended mainly on their ancestral properties for their sustenance and hence they had enough time to spend in the *Mandir*. Bhaina used to arrange for their smoking and other minor intoxicants.

Gokul *Bhaina* alias Gokul Chandra Mekap gave a novel proposal for the betterment of the *Mandir*. It was proposed that all the artists and artisans of the village would be involved in the

activities of the *Mandir* for their betterment. Close to Dadhivamana Math's altar, a meeting was convened. From experts in preparing thatched roofs, to the painters wielding brushes—all were invited to the meeting. It seemed to me as if, such a huge congregation of the guild of artists was never convened before from the great Mohenjodaro civilisation till date. At the outset, Gokul *Bhaina* briefed the essence of the meeting. Proposals were accepted. In place of the *Shilpakala Mandir*, a new *Charukala Mandir* sprang up. Gokul *Bhaina* was the President and Lokanath *Bhaina*, the Secretary. Close to the *panchayat* office near the junction of the village end, a room was taken. On Sarasvati *Puja* day, following all rituals of invoking the Goddess of Learning, this new institution was ceremonially set up.

A condition was imposed that whoever from outside would come to the village for any work, he would have to place his orders with *Charukala Mandir*. The President would ask the expert artist (according to the nature of the demand) to prepare those items. But it was observed that the potters were working according to their own designs and whimsies. The painter had sold his pack of cards. My *Bhaina* also chose his own route. It seemed as if all had forgotten their brain child. When asked about the plight of *Charukala Mandir*, Gokul *Bhaina* said that he could comfortably sit in his homoeopathy clinic and look at the entire village. No one came to him, he complained. The dark patch of cloud that fluttered temporarily in the sky of *Mandir's* fortune disappeared. The *Shilpakala Mandir*, as before, trod on its usual path.

Alas, there is no trace of the *Shilpakala Mandir* in the village today.

THE FESTIVAL OF OSHAKOTHI

The tradition of the *Oshakothi* festival in Southern Orissa, and particularly in Ganjam district, is deep-rooted and widespread. Although this festival is observed in a few places in Western Orissa known by various other names, *Oshakothi* is the sole property of Ganjam. More than two hundred villages centring round Aska town celebrate this festival. From Khallikote to Parlakhemandi in the South, and from Bhanja Nagar in the West, to Huma, Ganjam and Berhampur in the East, this festival is celebrated with much pomp and show.

Oshakothi is celebrated like a regional festival in Ganjam, as Durga Puja in the districts of Cuttack and Puri. Depending on the financial condition of the people in the villages, this festival is observed for seven days to a month or more. In the villages where *Padhan*, *Redika* (*Reddy*), *Golla* (shepherds), *Hadi* and *Bauri* live, this festival is celebrated fondly. During my school days, *Bhaina* and I painted hundreds of *Oshakothi* shrines. *Oshakothi* paintings are done inside temporary structures made from bamboo scraps and also inside community houses of the villages. We got Rs. 15 as wages to paint the four walls of the shrine. The greed for money prompted us to accept advances from forty to fifty parties to paint the *Oshakothi* shrines at a time. So each day we were to complete three to four shrines. Even if in Ganjam the villages were well-connected by roads, these roads were *kacha* and it was impossible to get to these villages by bus. We were left with no other alternative but to cover the distance on foot. *Bhaina* humorously named it *Sricharan* service (i.e., service by foot). Soon after our arrival in the shrine, I would change my pants and shirt and begin preparing colours in the coconut shells. After *Bhaina* announced our arrival to the *Pradhan* of the shrine, we used to start our painting. Making an eye measurement of the



wall, we used to make a comparison, between the wall space and the contracted wages to decide on the motifs to be painted. The walls were divided into three or four horizontal tiers. In the centre of the wall a vertical compartment was left to initiate the Shiva *Tandava*. *Bhaina* would ask the *Pradhan* or *Jani* to render offerings before we could begin the image of Shiva *Tandava*. *Bhaina* made the preliminary sketching on which I used to make the outline of Shiva with ultramarine blue. Shiva was white so also the bull, therefore leaving the snake, ornaments, kettle drum, tiger skin and the *Hauda* on the bull's back—the rest of the space was painted white. It took only half an hour to paint the motif of Shiva *Tandava*. The Shiva *Tandava* did not resemble the Chola Natraj bronze. For the Shiva in the *Oshakothi* was standing in *Chauka* posture of the Odissi dance, Odissi dance bending his legs sidewise on his mount Nandi. The helpless Nandi was reduced almost to a white pig. Then out of the three horizontal bands of the wall, in the second tier we used to paint images of the Goddesses. On either side of the dancing Shiva, there were images of Ganga and Yamuna. Close to them were Goddess Durga, Kali Bhairavi, Chamunda, Sarasvati, Lakshmi. *Bhaina* took great care in painting these important deities as these were the centres of attraction or repulsion in an *Oshakothi* mural.

We could not understand then the importance the villagers attached to these painted Gods and Goddesses. But when I began my research on *Oshakothi* in the eighties with my friend from Switzerland, Eberhard Fischer, I realised that not a single motif of the *Oshakothi* mural was trite or insignificant. As in Lanka every one measured equal, similarly even a small motif in the *Oshakothi* had its essential significance. Had we really known this secret, we would not have faced so much difficulty in getting our legitimate wages. After these Goddesses were painted in the middle frieze, I used to draw the images of seven sisters, five Pandava brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, mace-bearing Bhima, twelve farmers, etc. on the top row of the wall. In my paintings at times five or six women carrying pitchers on their heads used to figure out in place of the seven sisters. Similarly I sometimes forgot to include Nakula or Sahadeva in the group of five

Pandava brothers. Such mistakes were obvious because of *Bhaina's* insistence on maintaining the time schedule. I did not bother at all about these minor lapses. But it is only now that I realise I committed unforgivable crimes. We were not traditional painters and so it was not possible to know the repertoire of *Oshakothi* paintings. Our *Oshakothi* paintings were conspicuous by their difference from the murals of the village traditional *chitrakaras*.

By the time I completed painting the top row, *Bhaina* could also complete the bottom frieze with the figures of *Hadi-Hadiani, Kandha-Kandhuni*, washerman-washer woman, gardener and his wife, the patient and the village quack, the non-native inhabitant, two companions, etc. Beneath these three tiers it was customary to paint a boat or at times a python on whose body all other painted motifs were installed. The motifs which were familiar to us occupied the first compartments and the rest of the compartments we used to fill with irrelevant motifs like the flower vase, inverted fish, foliages, creepers, which were of course attractive to look at.

While painting the *Oshakothi* mural, a thought used to lurk in me—cut your coat according to your cloth. The analytical comparison between the wages, the wall space, the colour and time stood before the young inspired artist's mind as an enemy.

When the real artist from within me would advocate improving the quality of the painting, another self—the commercial artist's self—would be crushing the sentimentalism of the genuine artist. Caught in the cross currents of this conflict, the paintings had to suffer a lot. On the other hand, the paintings of traditional *chitrakaras* could retain scriptural sanction. And as they were professional painters of *Oshakothi*, they were doing it perfectly well as if in a natural flow. But I remember *Bhaina* could intelligently solve the intricate problems involved in our painting. There was tremendous influence of calendars and cinema posters on our paintings which attracted the young minds who eulogised our efforts. The traditional painters made use of only three to four primary colours, and rendered the figures in profile. But our paintings were quite different with

multi-colour applications and use of western photographic perspectives. Because of this, the English educated youth were quite attracted.



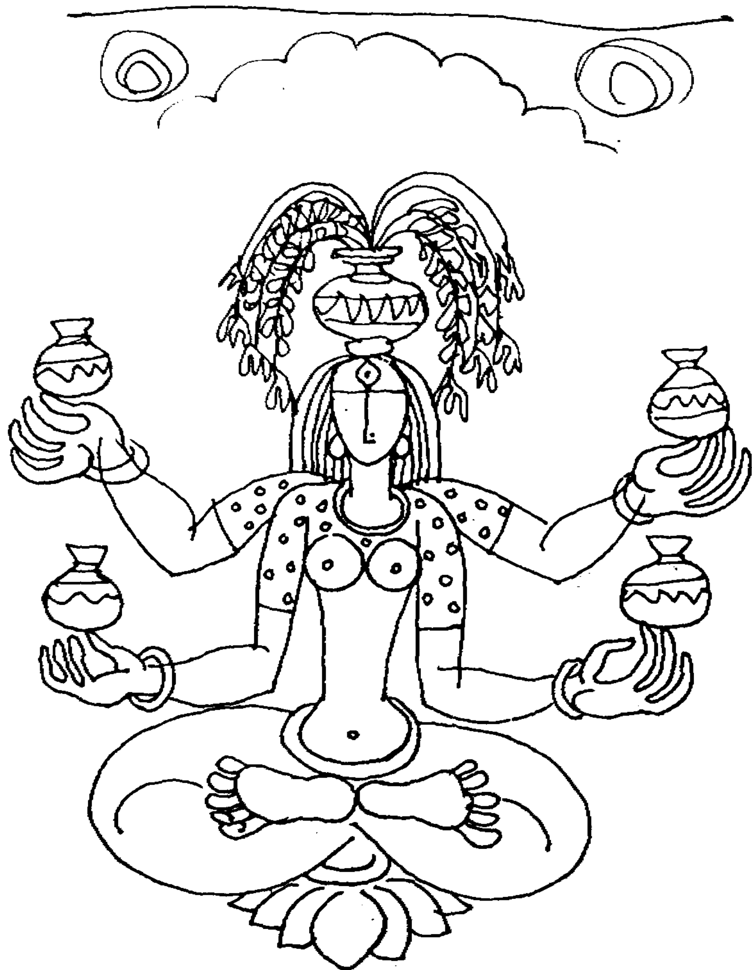
In place of fine intricate design and cotton sarees of the traditional painters, we used glossy colours and terelyne sarees on figures. Our Durga looked more like Nargis or Suraiya and our Shiva at times resembled N.T. Rama Rao. Of course, I mean that matinee idol N.T. Rama Rao. The young boys of the village appreciated our paintings. But the elderly people were critical. A full bench court was summoned in the community house to make an analytical evaluation of our artistic excellence. This court then decided on the wages we should receive and how far this would conform to the initially contracted rates. Like a heinous criminal facing the judge in the dock, we two brothers had to shield ourselves against a barrage of questions put to us by the presiding chief and tried to satisfy them with our witty answers. I list below a few questions for the benefit of the readers.

1. Why are the two ears of the face not visible in a profile portrait?
2. Why would the saree and blouse look plain instead of being spotted or gaudy?
3. Why would you use colours in tonal grades instead of thick layers?
4. Why aren't there meanders between the borders around the niches ?

Bhaina did appear as the convict and tried to give proper answers to the questions. In every village there were one or two elderly touts who would deliberately deduct a rupee or two from our contracted wages, despite our satisfactory explanations. It appeared to me then, as if, the true measure of our artistic excellence rested on the likes and dislikes of the village chiefs and we had to suffer mental frustrations being unable to bear this injustice due to the natural sentimentalism of an artist. We were helpless then. But the artists' ego had to wither away against the mounting pressures of poverty and infinite anguish. During *Dasahara*, we had to endure many such insults only to survive as artists. More than three decades have passed. Even if *Oshakothi* is being celebrated these days in different parts of Ganjam, I had no occasion to paint *Oshakothi* murals with the same old enthusiasm and verve. I have collected facts and photographs of *Oshakothi* paintings, going round the villages for a research project in collaboration with my friend Eberhard Fischer. Accidentally if I happen to meet someone of my childhood, the lost vision of *Oshakothi* comes alive. Now I realise, if I had known the philosophy and essences of *Oshakothi* paintings in my childhood, I could have helped *Bhaina* more profitably, and gratifyingly.

Oshakothi paintings are entirely based on *Tantra* or the occult. On the limited space of the wall of *Oshakothi*, the pictures painted represented thirty-three crores of Gods and Goddesses. In Ganjam and its peripheral villages, it is the village Goddesses who are given places of prominence in *Kothisala*. Mahurikalua, Budithakurani, Khambesvari, Taratarini, Baidhar, Ghagudi, Panchan, Phula Sundari, Nisha Sundari, Bhalia Khai, Sobhanga,

Sukhuakhai, Kamalei, Vimalei, Ghantakapali and many such Goddesses were given places in the *Kothisala*. The Goddess Mangala is the presiding deity of the *Kothisala*. Mangala is being worshipped both in the *Ghata* and *Kothisala*. *Jani* and *Janiani*



worship and serve these deities in the *Kothisala. Adhikari* is its main organiser and chief. When observed with sanctity, it is believed that the barren women beget children, and the store-house overflows with foodgrains. On the other hand, those who neglect the ritual and criticise the festival, invite the wrath of the deities and the village becomes a black pole (fire devastates the village). It is because of Mangala's mercy that the fried paddy germinates. The mythological Bhima tills the land with the help of tigers and bullocks.

If it got dark by the time we completed paintings of the *Kothisala,* we would spend the night in the village. When *Dasahara* was near, the *Devatas* and the singers would crowd there in the evenings. Even if they fast for the Goddesses of *Kothisala* all the day they smell of country liquor in the evening. When the evening deepened, devotees and spectators crowded the place. If the *Kothisala* was packed, people used to get outside under the canopy spreading the paddy-drying mats. *Jani* used to throw handfuls of incense and resin on the brazier. Smoke curled up and filled the room. The *devatas* who were observing the rituals were waiting to be interrogated. Holding the bunch of peacock feathers and the pot of fire, *Jani* would come closer to the painting of Mangala and add resin to the fire. Seven times she would whip over the painting of Mangala with the help of the peacock feathers. She applied the vermilion mark on the Goddess. The singer cleared his throat to begin the prayers for Mangala. Another devotee would then try to stir the *dhanakoila* (musical earthen drum). The atmosphere would become grave and disciplined. The womenfolk of the village sound *hulahuli.* The singer would become elated. He would then sing the prayers to Mangala:

Mother Mangala, you are Sarva Mangala
Mangala. Mangala. You are Ghata Mangala
I beseech thee, O', the Mother of the universe.
O' Mother, the Mother of the Universe. I bow to Narayani
I offer my misery at thy feet,
O' the primordial Mother.

Your eyes are bright and rolling.
Your glance is tangential and graceful.
On your forehead shines the mark of vermilion
And in your hands the rosary.
Swaying your body, you move.
On your head would rest the torn basket
On your feet would be the red shoes
On your arms would shine the gilded armlets
O'dear Mother.
Mangala, Mangala, O' Mother Mangala,
Mangala Mangala Mother you are Bata Mangala.
You keep your son Baidhara, in your company,
O' Mother Son Baidhara would be in your company.
Ghagudi Panchana would be with you
Also in the company would be Bainsi Sena.
O' Primordial Mother O' Mother Mangala......

The singers have a dominant role in the *Oshakothi* festival. They are well versed in epics, non-epics, couplets and folksongs. They are experts in composing songs instantly from memory and sing to tunes, and that is why they are in great demand. The singers come to the *Oshakothi* festival on contract from nearby villages. But *Devatas* belong to the village where *Oshakothi* is celebrated. Since they perform as *Devatas* year after year they are accustomed to the manners of *Devatas*. Barring a few old men and women, the *Oshakothi* celebration was either meaningless or trite for others. If the financial position is sound, the festival continues for more than a month beyond the limits of the ritualistic period and it then becomes a source of entertainment for the villagers.

By the time the singer completes his prayer, the *Devatas* take their respective positions. The *Devata* who would be possessed on that eve is declared well in advance. *Jani*, holding the peacock feathers and brazier goes to the painting of Mangala and begins to invoke her. The incense of resin spreads over the entire room engulfing the crowd. From among the devotees lost in the mystery of the crowd, the appointed *Devata* leaps out with a vigorous and frightening shriek. The *Devata* then starts leaping

like a frog. For some time, *Jani* brings in the fire pot closer to the *Devata's* face fanning the flame high. Then he puts a vermilion mark on the *Devata's* forehead, and whips his body with the peacock feathers. It seemed then, as if, the life-spirit from the painted Goddesses on the wall emerges and gets installed in the body of the *Devata*. He slowly straightens, pretends to have been under the spell of the divine power, and swaying his body, begins to move to and fro. The women encourage the *Devata* with their *Hulahuli*. The singer in order to inspire the *Devata* sings prayers. (In the following song Baidhara has been invoked.)

Accept the prayers
O' my dear Baidhara, the son of a sage.
You appear here in my place of worship,
Why you call me once and again....etc.
O' the son of the sage.
You have a dark horse to ride
You put on a sandal paste mark
and you like to roam about.
Gaja Bhima is your brother.
He got the seeds germinated with pleasure.
I have asked the deaf sister
to watch the sproutings.
The birds may eat them up
O' Bhimsen the birds
may devour them.

Baidhara begins to dance to the tune of the song. At times instead of one *Devata*, three or four *Devatas* would leap to the centre of the ritual space like frogs and begin to hiss and the singer like the snake-charmer taming his snakes, tames them by singing.

It is both amusing and educative to observe the tug of war between the singers and *Devatas* through their questions and answers and unfoldment of riddles. A series of questions and their answers based on non-epics mostly fictitious stories even unknown to the elderly people of the village makes the entire situation exciting and exhilarating. Question and answer

sessions continue night after night and people have no hesitation to stay on with no sign of sleep in their eyes. I cite here such a riddle:

A certain son narrates a story, O listen,
He addressed his mother as mother;
But the mother informed him that she was not so,
I'm rather your sister. The son was startled.
Met his father and addressed him as father,
But the father retorted: listen my dear, I'm not
Your father but the eldest brother-in-law,
Why do you call me father?
The son was startled at such an answer.
He went to his brother and addressed him as "brother."
The brother replies, I am not your brother.
I would be your nephew. Your are my uncle
And I, your nephew.
He then hurries to his maternal grandpa,
And addressed him as "grandpa," who soon
Replied: I am not your grandpa,
But your father, O dear.
You foolish guy, you call me your lad.
Hearing this, the son was puzzled.
Tell me the answer of this riddle.

Answer given by the singer:

O'dear, listen to your answer.
Kusha addressed Sita as his mother.
I'm not your mother, why do you address me so.
He called upon Ramachandra and addressed him as "Dad,"
Ramachandra replied: I would be your brother-in-law.
Then he went to Lava and addressed him as "brother."
Brave Lava then said: I am your nephew and not brother,
Kusha was shocked at the reply.
He met Rishi Janaka.
Addressed him as grandfather.
Janaka said that he was not his grandpa,

I'm your father, why do you call me otherwise?
Kusha was born from the tuft of *Kusha* grass.
This is what is valid and registered even today.

(Clue: Both Sita and Kusha were born out of the earth, therefore the relation was sister and brother, not mother and son).

This battle of questions and answers continues till midnight. At last the singer registers his thanks to the *Devata* and bids him farewell. The beating of the Devatas' retreat is equally time consuming like their arrival at the beginning.

This decorous and excellent tradition of *Oshakothi* is gradually becoming extinct. Instead of paintings on the wall, the organisers resort to printed and framed calendars and instead of live questions and answers by singers and *Devatas*, videos are shown. At times Hindi films are screened. There is no trace of *Oshakothi* in Digapahandi. I wonder, if the *Oshakothi* might totally vanish from our tradition.

SITANUSANDHANA NATAKA
(The Search of Sita : A Play)

Perhaps I was then in Class VIII. At that time the *Sitansusandhana* play created a sensation in my village and furore in the neighbourhoods, like Ramanand Sagar's TV serial *Ramayana* captivating educated urbanites. The concept of stage-setting and the lustre and glamour of the costumes of *Sitanusandhana* are missing in Ramanand Sagar's TV serial. In other words, precisely speaking, the facilities which Ramanand had in exhibiting the glamour and richness on TV, the organisers of the play thirty years ago in the village of Digapahandi did not possess.

From the day of rehearsal of this play, the elderly people of the village raising their eyebrows, sarcastically remarked: "Pooh! how can these young guys stage *Sitanusandhana*?" This play was staged at a time when the King Krupamaya Dev was reigning. The playwright Kavisurya was present during the rehearsals. At times the King himself was also present at the time of rehearsal. In the ante-courtyard of the King's palace, the pit for the audience was dug and the stage erected. The King Krupamaya had given his arch-cutlass and golden earrings to Ravana. Similarly the queen also gave her gilded waist belt, necklace, finger rings for Mandodari to use on the stage. Utmost care had been taken to make up the King of Lanka, the ten-headed Ravana. The King's foster son, born of the King's clandestine affair with a palace maid, took the role of Ravana. He resembled the King every inch. Those days men used to appear in the roles of Mandodari and other female characters. To heighten the elegance of a woman, a pair of breasts were created by fixing two cocount shells to their chest. Covering those shells when the men put on the *raika* (blouse), they looked exactly like women. Now,

of course, these arrangements have been changed. There is no scarcity of female artistes to act on the stage even in the villages. But when I was in school, only men performed the roles of women on the stage.

This is all that I have learnt of the play *Sitanusandhana* of the king's time from people. With much pomp and show *Sitanusandhana* was organised. For setting up of Ravana's court on the stage, the King's silver throne, royal umbrella, fly whisks and long handled fans were brought on to the stage that gave the impression of the golden Lanka. King Krupamaya Dev along with his chief queen, palace maids, servants and officials reached



the pit. The play began and one after another, scenes were enacted on the stage. Eventually there came the golden Lanka and the scene of Ravana's *Durbar*. Ravana sitting on Krupamaya's throne, his arch-cutlass hung from his waist with Mandodari seated on his left thigh, whirling his moustaches with his left hand, uttered: "Mandodari." Then he began to pat Mandodari's cheek. The King who had given his arch-cutlass and the ear rings to Ravana and was watching the play sitting helplessly without his royal possession, felt an erosion inside his heart. At that opportune moment the tricky retainer from behind the King whispered into his ears: "Whatever it might be, he is a mere bastard. Is he right in twisting his moustache when you, the almighty, are sitting in the front?" These few words pierced deep into the King's heart and began to smoulder like the withered straw catching fire. The King is blind and so is water. Then it seemed to the King as if Ravana had overpowered him, snatched his throne and his kingdom and was expressing his jubilation with laughter; could he endure such an injustice happening in front of his own eyes? Krupamaya all of a sudden ordered: "Who are there?" The dark skinned *Paikas* with huge sticks in their hands, leapt on to the stage. Within the twinkle of an eye, they went on thrashing and hammering Ravana, Mandodari and other characters. The stage was converted into a real Lanka burnt by Hanuman. The stage was filled with wild shrieks and wailings. Beaten by *Paikas*, many succumbed to injuries—blood oozed from their heads and backs. A few moments before Ravana who was busy fondling Mandodari on his thigh, and Mandodari who was feeling elated—both began to run and escape helplessly. Mandodari, bearing the cocount-shell breast and golden waist belt reached his home with a couple of injury marks on his back. Ravana carrying the King's big cutlass escaped for his home too.

Sitanusandhana could not be concluded on the stage. The theatre stage was converted into a battlefield. None but the King was the loser. The Queen could not get back her golden waist belt. The King lost his earrings. With much difficulty he could get back his arch-cutlass. It was mostly similar to the condition of

Sanjay Khan when the sets caught fire at the time of shooting *Tipu Sultan*, a TV serial.

After almost four decades of this foolish incident when the proposal of enacting *Sitanusandhana* in the village came up again, the old men and women were certainly justified in raising their eyebrows. They were in a dilemma: how could they get the golden waist belt and silver throne as the King Krupamaya was no more?

Bhaina, Meghanada, the bangle seller of Gadachaitanyapur, Natabar Martha, the drawing master of our school, Dera Acheya, the curtain painter of Padmanabhapur, and I as the junior artist were in charge of the stage management, costume and make-up. *Bhaina* and Meghanada did the entire visualisation. How would the villagers know that in the neighbouring town Berhampur, golden as well as silver laces and tinsel sheets of various shades were already available then? For the first time in my life, I had the opportunity to see those laces and dazzling sheets. *Bhaina* used to say that these old men of the village would not be able to delve into the illusion of these laces. He even declared that he would also make Ravana put on golden shoes. *Bhaina's* statement created further confusion among the elderly men. In the Dadhivamana temple, the structure of the golden Lanka set was prepared. The woven bamboo mats were rolled for shafts, bases and capitals were made from square tea packing boxes. Horizontal silver beams were placed on these pillars and trifold cusped arches were fitted beneath the beams. After pasting golden paper it seemed as if the bamboo mats were transformed into sheets of gold.

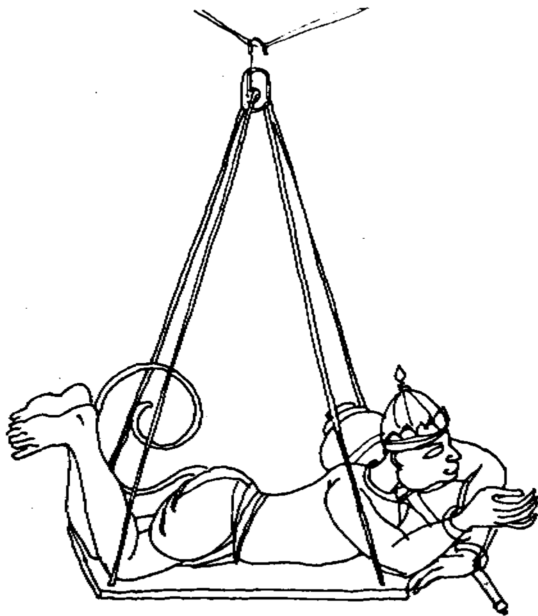
In order to witness the golden Lanka and Ravana's *Durbar*, the flow of people headed towards the Dadhivamana temple. People whispered among themselves that the decoration had surpassed the Krupamaya period. Krupamaya had only given the Queen's golden waist belt and his arch-cutlass, but he did not have enough gold to create a golden Lanka.

Within a very short period, the pillars, the arches, the walls, the doors, all became golden. The old men changed their opinion as they often do at the time of an election. They began to praise

the young boys of the village in charge of the management of the play. Tauntingly these elderly men earlier used to say that the *Sitanusandhana* play of the past retained the quality of *kiya* flowers and that of today smells like jasmine whose fragrance does not last even for a day. *Bhaina* and Meghanada received praise for retaining the fragrance of *kiya*. In fact, the credit goes to the golden tinsel sheets.

Impressed by the glare of the golden Lanka, some people who were associated with the play during Krupamaya's time volunteered to get themselves involved in the present enactment. My childhood friend Kishore Chandra Adhikari's father, Gopal Adhikari volunteered to direct the play, particularly the scene of Sita's wailing in the *Ashokavana*. According to his direction, Sita resting her left hand on the ground kept her legs back stretching to the right side. She then began to beat her forehead and chest, more than a dozen times wailing pitiably: "O' my Lord! O' my Lord! " Watching the scene, the English educated, Hindi-movie going youth of the village began to laugh. Gopal Adhikari, feeling insulted immediately withdrew himself from directing. Amid many scenes of the play what created a serious problem for the stage managers and setters was the scene setting of Hanuman's leap over the seas. *Bhaina*, Meghanad, *Kanamana Bhaina*, Natabara Martha and Dera Acheya of Padmanabhapur sat over two or three sessions and had a thorough discussion of the problem. *Bhaina* proposed to present the scene with the help of the magic lantern. *Kanamana Bhaina* and Meghanad suggested that they could cut a miniature of Hanuman from the pitch-board and then its silhouette picture would be allowed to leap. But Acheya's proposal was new and innovative. According to Acheya's plan, a swing would be prepared. From one end of the stage to the other, strong wires would be hung. The swing would be suspended from the wire. Hanuman would occupy the swing in a flying posture. With the help of a rope, the swing would be pulled twice or thrice across the stage. Beneath the swing the bamboo-woven mat with a picture of waves painted on it would be kept, and the mat would be wound and rolled and this would create the illusion of the sea and waves. Somehow everybody accepted Acheya's proposal and it was executed.

The waves remained below and above the waves was the wire running through. The swing was suspended from the wire. Bainath Panigrahi of *Sanadanda* street enacted the role of Hanuman. Fatigued after the day's toil, frying *bara* and *piaji* in his make- shift restaurant, Bainath came in the evening to perform the role of Hanuman. Hanuman's role was not like the King's and hence his dress was not so. He would not put on the glistening dress of a king. Bainath's appearance was not fit for the role of Hanuman. Of course he resembled apes since he was thin. But for the role of the invincible Hanuman, Bainath's physical appearance was not at all suitable. It was perhaps because Bainath walked faster, the director permitted him to perform the role of Hanuman. A heaven and hell difference between Darasingh and Bainath. *Bhaina* and I were in charge of the make-up. Hanuman's body was painted red. The coarse cotton was dipped in the solution of rubber and then it was pressed on the upper lip so that the human face would give the look of a monkey's. It took almost an hour to complete



Hanuman's make-up. Bainath was a short-tempered fellow. Sitting in front of the burning hearth throughout the day, he was not only tired but also disgusted. Darkening the stage, Hanuman was asked to sit on the swing. Making a fold of his *dhoti* across the loin, Hanuman sat on the swing in a flying posture. The mace was between his neck and shoulder and he held its tip with one hand. The tail in the flying attitude was pinned to the strings of the swing. The stage was lighted. Attempts were made to pull the swing from the wires without much difficulty. Hanuman in the swing could be dragged up to the middle of the stage. But it did not move further. Because of the weight of the swing, the wire got twisted and hence Hanuman the valiant had to halt in mid-stage. Bainath in the beginning could patch up the humiliating situation by his grimaces and facial expressions and by the movement of his limbs. Such a sight delighted the audience. They began to clap appreciating Hanuman's action. But at last when they were aware of Hanuman's humiliating plight, they began to whistle and created an uproar. Bainath's anger knew no bounds. Had Bainath been on the stage, he would have certainly fled. But he was almost like a prisoner on a swing. Finding no way out, he began to abuse the audience by using vulgar slang. Of course slang and vulgar slang were very common in Digapahandi and around. People didn't bother at all about Bainath's slang, as a result an anti-climax was created. The stage was made dark. Elderly people with much difficulty brought Bainath down to the stage and consoled him. Realising his responsibilities, Hanuman at last decided to walk down the distance to Lanka. The next scene was even funnier. Hanuman arrived at *Ashokavana* in order to find Sita. On the stage a grove was created with the trees studded with costly fruits such as oranges, grapes, apples, brought from Berhampur along with local varieties like guavas, mangoes, bananas and cucumbers. Of course the botanists would have certainly questioned how deodars could bear apples? But the stage artists were very clever in creating strangeness on the stage. How many in Digapahandi did actually see the apple trees? A flock of tamed pigeons were let loose in this grove. After Hanuman's humiliating journey to Lanka, the natural beauty of *Ashokavana* created transitory awe

and excitement in the audience. Those who used to buy a few bananas were very happy to see the full bunch of golden bananas. Children in the audience began to cry for the red apples and bunches of grapes. At this critical juncture, Bainath, in the role of Hanuman holding his mace, entered into *Ashokavana*. Resting his mace beside the rock formed by the pitchboard box, Hanuman began to taste oranges, grapes and apples to his utmost satisfaction. It was quite evident that he consumed the fruits as a token of his revenge against the insult he pocketed in the previous scene. It was quite obvious that others got vexed at the monkey as he alone was enjoying the fruits. The stage managers consoled themselves by saying that let the fellow take all fruits as he was annoyed in the last scene. Bainath's friends who sat with the audience began to comment that his health would smarten the day following after such a heavy consumption of delicious fruits. Saliva oozed from the children's mouths. Instantaneously Bainath caught sight of his son and daughter sitting in the front row. Even if the real Hanuman was a lifelong bachelor, the disguised Hanuman's paternal heart was moved. He threw a few apples at his own son and daughter. Many tender and tough hands were outstretched to receive fruits from Hanuman. Bainath thought that perhaps the audience appreciated his acting and their outstretched hands symbolised their appreciation. A few fruits were caught and some hit the heads of the audience, causing swelling. One or two were injured. They bled. Hitherto the audience sat quietly. But after the injury they began to use vulgar slang against Hanuman. They paid him back with the words Bainath flung at them in the last scene. They went a step further in adding new slang. The situation became tense and complicated. Out of disgust some people were about to leave. At this moment the stage was made dark. When light came, the scene of golden Lanka came to the view of the people. It was all aglow with the light of petromax.

Sitanusandhana was an eventful and expensive play. As Krupamaya earlier made the play memorable, similarly this time Dera Acheya and Bainath made it unforgettable. Of course, last time the play could not be staged till the end. This time also it happened so.

The gorgeous, luxurious look of Ravana's court scene attracted the people. No doubt the people of Digapahandi had seen gold in their eyes, but viewing the gate, arch, doors, walls—all glittering and golden they thanked their luck. Viewing Lanka and its circumventing gilded wall what Hanuman had said I forgot to mention. The dialogue of this play retained some inconsistencies. It was a queer blending of the serious and the ludicrous. Resting his mace on his shoulder and placing his hand on his waist, Hanuman said:

"Ah! What an elegant and high golden wall. The tuft of hair on the head is dropping. The boundary wall without an iota of doubt is certainly golden, otherwise how could it become twisted at the mere touch of a finger!"

Before I conclude this chapter, let me go back to the scene that followed the sequence of *Ashokavana*. Ravana ordered his followers to chain Hanuman for spoiling *Ashokavana*. Unfortunate Bainath! At first the painful plight of dangling on the swing, next this fettering. As if there was no joy except tasting the fruits in the life of Hanuman. Binding Bainath's slim body with the help of thick strong rope meant for lifting water from the well, he was dragged on to the stage. Helplessly in a pitiable condition Hanuman reached Ravana's gold-studded *Durbar*. And to his misfortune it was decided that the tail would be set on fire.

The next scene was the burning of Lanka. It was decided earlier that this scene would be shown with the help of the magic lantern. But all of a sudden, there was a hue and cry in the audience. People began to run hither and thither. Children tore the air with their cries. Ravana, Mandodari, Sita and others on the stage began to smell danger. It was a summer night. Slowly they could feel the hot wind blowing. All became restless, eager. They could hear the sound of the bamboo-burst. They could guess that somewhere in the village the houses were on fire. The audience was scattered. People began to run losing their breath. The helpless Hanuman carrying his mace leapt from the stage and began to run towards his thatched house to save it. The search for Sita by Hanuman could not be pursued further.

The use of painted curtains in theatre and drama enactments is no more in vogue these days. It is precisely because of the impact of open-air three-dimensional performances in *jatras*. What we introduced in Ganjam thirty to forty years ago and what the Ganjam painters and Chitralayas migrating over to Cuttack, popularised with regard to the use of painted curtains in the theatres, is now almost out of fashion. The emergence of *jatra* has marginalised the love for one-sided open stages and painted curtains. The introduction of painted theatre curtains or scenes to our cultural matrix was possible because of the British. I've already said before that our King had a theatre stage just down the *Sanadanda* street and provision of scenes was available then.

As the best player in cricket is chosen from the number of runs he has contributed, or the number of wickets he has taken, similarly if one takes an account of the highest number of theatre curtains that one has painted in Ganjam, certainly our names would occur next to Lakshmi Narayana Achari. *Bhaina* and I would have painted more than a thousand theatre curtains. Whereas Lakshmi Narayana Achari was given the government patronage for painting theatre curtains or for the excellence in stage craft to put it in right perspective our fate did not permit any such recognition. But as an artist or scene painter, Bhaina's name is still remembered fondly in Ganjam district. Almost twelve years ago Eberhard Fischer and I, in connection with collecting materials for a book on Orissa, reached the village Chhanameri. While watching the *Navagunjara* relief on the wall of the Shiva temple, some elderly men of that village could recognise me and told me that the theatre curtains I painted long ago were still there unravished, in the community house of the village. I could not but suppress the curiosity of looking at them

once more after such a long time and showed Eberhard these curtains.

Watching those curtains, Eberhard delivered a brilliant lecture on the importance of scene-painting and that lecture created in me a renewed attachment to the style of theatre curtain painting.

Many contemporary artists may perhaps raise their eyebrows with contempt for theatre curtain painting. But if we open the pages of the biographies of some eminent artists of India today, we will see that they began learning the alphabets of art through theatre curtain painting. From Maqbul Fida Husain to Krushna Kant Hebbar, I have heard their personal anecdotes with regard to their passion for scene painting.

Eberhard believes that the *pichwais* hung at Nathadwara were nothing but the miniature theatre curtains. As these painted clothes were hung behind Srinathji, they were known as *pichwais*. It would be erroneous to say that theatre curtain painting is out of fashion now. Leaving the rusticity of the village life, it has now reached the luxurious film studios of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta with revolutionary transformation in its shape and size.

In the beginning, I had no courage to go for theatre curtain painting. My training as a junior artist under *Bhaina* began from ordinary activities involved in theatre curtain painting. I used to cook the *Sirish* gum, give the preliminary coating of zinc-oxide on the screen, prepare the colour in coconut shells and pass on the colour containers to my *Bhaina*. We had to seek help from the school for the art room of Martha master or some temple or *Matha* for painting the scenes. According to the size of the stage, the huge roll of cloth was sewn with two pipefold at the top and bottoms making room for the roller to pass through. Inserting a huge bamboo into the pipefold at the top, the screen was hung from the beam and the rafter.

Inserting the roller into the lower pipe, the scene was hung and stretched by pressing the lower pipe fold by stones. Now was the time for applying the gum and zinc-oxide coating. After two coatings, the curtain could give the impression of a drum's tinkle.

Considering the thematic contents, the plays could be divided in two groups—mythological and social. Who made such a

division—whether the theatre-curtain painter or the play director is still a matter of mystery. These days a new type of play has been introduced, i.e., the historical plays. But for the theatre-curtain painters two broad divisions were enough. Every theatre group possessed two sets of scenes—mythological and social. Each set had five screens, such as drop, street, forest, court and garden. At times the rich theatre parties according to their choice added one or two more curtains to the set. Even for the social dramas, like in mythological plays, five to six scenes were necessary. The drop scene and the forest scene of the mythological set were used even in social plays. For social plays theatre curtains with rows of thatched houses and a temple in the middle, interior of middle class family house, and courtyard of an ordinary house are painted in lieu of street scene, *durbar* scene and the garden scene respectively. Every scene was flanked on both sides by wings and on its top wave-like frills, *Jhalara,* was hung. From behind these wings, the prompter whispers the dialogues to enable the actors on the stage to remember them. Behind these wings the characters organise their dresses before appearing on the stage. It is only here that the director of the play being emotional implants kisses on the cheeks of the women characters. The organisers, hiding themselves behind the screen, watch the play and the children of the village chiefs and elderly men of the village, peep through the wings to be identified by the audience which would give them (these children) an unknowable pride of being there. The frills hung from the top hide the nudity of the bamboos and the ropes which were used for the stage.

Every scene including the drop scene has a definite mode. In the critical idiom of art, it can be termed as style. Even with a little deviation from the prevalent style (of theatre curtain painting) the village chiefs do not appreciate the work and the painters' wages are deducted. *Bhaina* took the order from the people of Dengaosta to paint scenes. On account of urgent work, he left for Berhampur and the responsibility of completing the scenes fell on me. I was then in Class IX. Arriving at Dengaosta, I found Narasingha Padhi, another renowned painter, there. The

villagers had planned for a competition between two Padhis. The spirit of competition among the stage actors is deep-seated in their bones and marrows. But it is no less among the artists who paint scenes. When the villagers found me they were sure that the Goddess of Victory was on Narasingha Padhi's side.

It was quite natural on Narasingha Padhi's part to accept the challenge for I was unknown and amateur. He was my *Bhaina's* friend. So, he decided to paint the street scene and asked me to do the forest scene. I was very happy within, for it was really difficult to draw straight lines for the buildings set in perspective and finishing with shades. Without an expert hand, it would not be possible. In the forest scene, the lines may not be necessarily straight. I thought I could manage, for any kind of brush stroke would mean a motif in a forest scene. Within no time we were at work. Narasingha Padhi was an elderly man. He did not agree to work at night. I requested the villagers to arrange a petromax light for me so that soon after completing the assignment I could come back to Digapahandi taking a morning bus. There were



two or three friends in Dengaosta who arranged everything for me.

Before I began to paint, I thought of a plan: instead of following the conventional formula of the forest scene, I would try to work in an innovative manner and would amaze everyone. By three o'clock past midnight, I could complete the work. But in the morning I discovered the elderly men of the village whispering amongst themselves. "The young have spread the word that the forest scene has created a sensation in the world of scene-painting." They were willing to give me the status of Abhimanyu in the war of *Mahabharata*. The elderly men were busy shooting questions at me. For the convenience of the readers, I enlist below a few of those questions:

1. Where is the red tinged sky of the sunrise in the forest scene? Why does the peacock not sit on the distant hill beyond the horizon, exhibiting its picturesque feathers?
2. Why have the deer not come to the fountain that springs from the cavity of the mountain? A group of men being agitated twisted the question and enquired: What did the young artist think? Have the deer fled to the jungle of Gadamutha?
3. Why has the cobra not raised its hood from behind the old trunk of the tree? Where has the snake gone? Someone put the question in a more sarcastic way. Has the snake gone to the nearby Shiva temple?
4. Where is the squirrel? Why are the leaves of the tree not distinct, one by one?

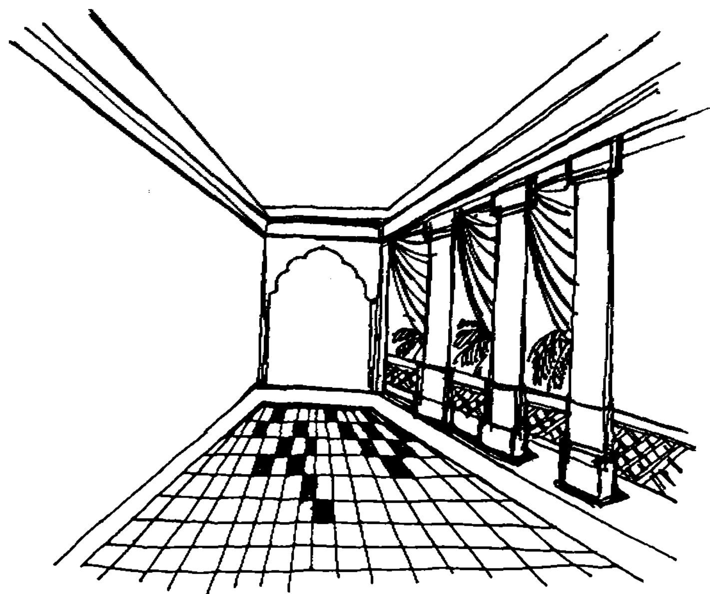
Many more questions. Of course Narasingha Padhi was not present when these people interrogated. Nor even was there evidence of any instigation on Padhi's behalf. Yet in such a competitive atmosphere it appeared to me as if Padhi had shot these missiles from behind. I was helpless and forlorn. In order to satisfy their queries, I was compelled to paint the motifs of peacock, squirrel, snake and the deer in the forest scene. Many liked the scene then. There was the consensus: "The boy knows it, but in a hurry he has forgotten." But I received ten rupees less than that was bargained for by Bhaina. I retained neither status

nor age to launch an argument with the elderly men of the village. Before leaving for my village, I called on Narasingha Padhi. Padhi flung a senior artist's sympathetic glance at me. There was no trace of any affection in that look. Perhaps he was confirming within himself that this boy had committed no wrongs. He possessed the hand of an expert. When he matures, he would surely become a good scene painter.

None would have any say over my painting had I really followed the conventional style. If one has to follow the conventional mode, one has to leave a space towards the top of the scene for the evening sky with setting sun and paint two mountains of equal height below this space. The sun would remain half-hidden between the mountains and a stream would descend down, thin at source and wider down below. The stream, instead of flowing straight, would creep like a snake. On either side of the stream, trees would be painted smaller at the distance and taller in the front. The tree that would be in the front should have a century-old trunk with cavities. From one of those cavities a cobra would raise its hood. And a squirrel on a branch of a tree raising its tail and lifting its two forelegs would taste the red ripe berry. It does not matter if the tree on which the squirrel sat does not bear the berries to which the squirrel is used. Why that particular tree alone, even if the fruit is not available in the trees of Ganjam district, it would not matter. One or two deer from behind the trees would be drinking water. While one would be drinking, the other would be looking back twisting its neck to smell danger. A crane or two would be hooking fish from the stream. Like the deer, these cranes too were behaving in similar fashion. When one crane picked up a fish, the other looked back.

Not only the forest scene, but every scene retained its formula and style. No distortion or deviation of the formula was permissible. The contemporary artists do not bother about such formulae or styles. At the mere sight of the theatre curtain, they would be startled by its size. But they would be happy if a painting would fetch them nothing less than a lakh of rupees. We were hardly getting then two hundred rupees for the entire set that included colours and all other painting materials. The

conviction of Dera Acheya of Padmanabhapur with regard to the theatre curtain painting formula was honest and abiding. One scene per day—that was his formula. Without strictly adhering to this formula, one would surely incur loss. I mention below the formulae of a few scenes.



The Durbar

The lines would be drawn diagonally on the scene to locate the centre point. A vertical rectangle taking slices from the four large triangular areas would be made whose diagonals would also meet at the centre point. The upper line of the vertical rectangle formed the base line of the ceiling, the lower one would constitute the floor and the two sides formed the walls of the *Durbar*. In front of the rectangle, the picture of a throne was drawn. When the play was to be enacted, the King would appear here seated on a wooden chair improvised for the throne. The black square marbles would be set on the floor, smaller in size

near the thorne gradually getting enlarged in the front. The marble squares would be painted white and black alternating. Similarly, on the ceiling, plain or decorated relief panels from small to large size would be fitted. On either side of the throne, pillars would be painted smaller at the centre and larger towards the wings. Sometimes these pillars would be single, and at times double. The bases of the pillars would be joined by a *zali* parapet. From the capital of every pillar a velvet screen half folded would be hung. From behind the gaps of the pillars and hanging screens, the coconut trees and the garden could be enjoyed. During the staging of the play, the ministers and courtiers would be seated on the chairs adjacent to the pillars. If the readers fail to comprehend the formula, they could recollect a couple of court scenes from the TV Ramayana serial.

Street Scene

The preliminary geometrical structure of the court scene is also relevant in the street scene. The centre point of the scene is located, drawing lines diagonally. At the centre, the two streets would get fused in the horizon receeding gradually from the wing sides. Even if the street scene was used in the mythological plays, the light posts would be visibly fading into the horizon at the centre point, where the sunrise or sunset takes place, and the golden rays of the setting sun spreads over the wavering patches of cloud. At times the portraits of waiting women or heroines were painted on the balcony of the buildings on either side. If the scene was meant for the mythological plays, exquisitely carved wooden pillars, and intricately designed parapets replace the ordinary ones. Buildings painted in various shades of colours would create a deep impression on the organisers.

Garden

Beautiful garden scenes were necessary for the medieval heroes and heroines. The scene would include on its left a romancing *porch (Keli mandapa)*, on its right a fountain and a little further, the sequestered arbours studded with flowers of multiple colours. The fountain would be either circular or

hexagonal and at its centre would be standing a beautiful lady figure with provocative postures, fashioned in imitation of Italian marble sculptures. And all around would be green velvet lawns that never grow anywhere in Orissa. Sometimes, the open pavilion is transformed into a two-storeyed building with jambs, doors and windows resembling Roman arches. After the curtain is fully painted the atmosphere gave a dreamy and imaginary look. And this could be truly a medieval prince's dream garden.

Middle Class Family House

This scene is the social formåt of the royal *Durbar* curtain. The interior of a middle class family house on the left side, a door and on the right , a window with a pair of shutters with glass fittings. On the wall, the bookshelf with bound books of different colours, half-consumed medicine bottles, and at the top a hand-winding alarm watch. Just above the wall-almirah two or three Bombay scenery and in case of necessity, a few calendars of Gandhiji or Gopabandhu were hung. In front of such a scene an educated youth awaited his lady-love. Or else a beautiful half-educated girl lay on the Bombay pattern cot waiting for her doctor or engineer lover, fixing her glance on the door or window with desire and anxiety. Or at times, she droops her head down in front of a dim lantern on the wooden table to write a love letter.

If I describe every scene, it would assume epical dimension. So I will conclude with the drop scene.

Drop Scene

Based on two themes, the drop scenes were traditionally painted. The first was the picture of a Nataraj. And the second one was of a woman with folded hands squatting and offering her devotion to the Sun God at the time of the sunrise on the sea-shore. Both these themes were painted within a circle. So as in the *Durbar* scene and street scene, the centre point was located. On four sides bordering the scene, a panel of forest creepers, meanders interpersed with medallions almost two and half feet wide was painted. At times in lieu of creepers, a couple of swans or elephant motifs were painted. After the circle was drawn, on

the triangular space left across all corners, either the Rahu head or the motif of a butterfly was drawn. These pictures were significantly painted with ultramarine colour. At times, the organisers suggested the use of snuff colour in place of the ultramarine. Towards the lower circumference of the inner circle, a hemispherical dome symbolising the globe was drawn and the impression of the dancing Nataraj on it was given. From behind this hemispherical dome, the lolling tongues of flames ascended, which helped in accentuating the beauty and glamour of the dancing Shiva. The image of Shiva retained the forms of *Chola* bronze combined with gaudy colours of Hindi cinema. From the right lower palm of Nataraj oozed the fountain of bliss, visible like the rays of the sun, and from his third eye emerged the sparks of anger. The young damsel seated on the seashore was adorned with the *Mekhala* golden skirts that hung from the waist to the knee, like that of an Ajanta figure. Her body was bare from the waist upward. And casually she knotted a thin apron covering her breasts. The eyelids of this beauty were half-open as if in ecstasy. The fingers wore the look of the buds of *Champak*. At the feet of this figure, the artist did paint his signature. It appears as if this figure is the painter's beloved of his own imagination.

Ignoring these two conventional themes, we were unsuccessful in trying the paintings of Nrusingha Rama-Lakshmana or broadly speaking, we had incorporated non-conventional themes into the traditional format of drop scenes. Nowadays, with the revolutionary change in theatre arts, even in the villages people use cut-out scenes and single-sets. And precisely for this reason, the organisers have lost their faith in the conventionally painted theatre curtains. Those who have made attempts to free our theatre art from the foreign influence, and those who have already stopped the use of painted curtains in plays, if they go to London, Paris, Zurich, Moscow, Germany, and see how in the European countries they are reintroducing the painted curtains in an innovative manner, they would realise the significance of such scenes and would not hesitate to reintroduce them in our country. However, despite all revivals we would not be able to get the flavour of Dera Acheya's theatre curtain painting

CHAI MASTER'S SCHOOL AND MARTHA MASTER'S TUITION

In our village, in those times Chai Master's school was a great institution. These days, it is very difficult to discover the kind of discipline and intimacy, the school had retained. During his lifetime Chai Master must have built the careers of more than five thousand students. But no one has heard of any government acknowledging Chai Master's contribution. Though nicknamed Chai Master, his full name was Sri Chaitanya Pattnaik. Almost a bachelor all his life, devoting all his time to the adoration of Goddess Sarasvati, he was left with no time to think of maintaining a family. During the fag end of his career, as far as I remember, he sheltered a *Guruma.* But he had no children. After fathering so many students, what else was left in his life to become an actual father? On the banks of the *Badabandha,* running parallel to the King's palace, was the train-like house. In front of the house, two pieces of homestead land, half-broken earthen wall, followed by three or four apartments, and at last the extensive open backyard that got fused into the cultivable fields, as if depicting an unilinear evolution from the agricultural civilisation to the recent urbanisation. In the house lived his *Nana* (elder brother, as it is with Brahmins *Bhaina*). He would never address even the British Governor-General with usual respect. Such hierarchical order of address did not exist in his dictionary. His name was Sri Radhashyam Pattnaik. He was a bachelor too. Whatever little blemish Chai Master retained in his character, but Radhashyam Pattnaik's character was clean and immaculate. Even though Radhashyam Pattnaik was the eldest, the school was named after Chai Master, following a tradition of naming the temple after Jagannatha even though Balabhadra was the eldest brother. This institution had earned renown in almost ten to fifteen surrounding villages.

Chai Master used to leave his bed in *Brahmamuhurta*, the early dawn. Wearing on a half jacket, and a knee-smacking *dhoti*, and placing a rustic towel on his shoulder, he used to go out, a cane



in hand, in search of his students. Strict discipline rather than studies was the primary principle of the school. By the time he came back, traversing through the village, it would be nine or nine thirty. Within this four or five hours of time he was able make four to five hundred students leave their beds, brush their teeth and come to school carrying their bags. Everyone's name was on the tip of his tongue. He would go to every house and standing at the front door, shout names of the students: "Eh Sania, have you left your bed? O, Rajiv, hurry up, hurry up, it's time." Listening to Chai Master's grave voice, Sania snoring below the torn quilt, would jump out of his bed, and his father hastening to the front verandah would bow to Chai Master. Within these few seconds of his stay, Chai Master used to present Sania's father his son's progress report and render guidance for his future studies. In case of any remark on the progress, or any defect in his behaviour, Chai Master used to warn Sania's father. This was also the time for Chai Master to collect the tuition fees from the parents. In case he discovered a study-thief, someone who was avoiding his studies, he would at once rush into the house, with the cane in hand. Master had no restrictions. Whether the truant or naughty student would hide behind his mother or in the kitchen, Master would not hesitate to drag him out and punish him. It won't be a mistake to say that there was no student in the village who could escape the sight of our Chai Master.

Chai Master was to repeat the usual routine of the morning in the evening. Obviously one may speculate on what he taught in the school! The teaching programme was strange. In the morning session we used to practice mathematics and the numerical table (*Panikia*); in the afternoon we studied literature. Neither was there a blackboard nor tables and chairs in the school. We sat on the cow-dung washed floor. There were two grass woven mats for the two teachers. Children used to wrap one or two books and a slate in a make-shift bag and bind the bundle with the help of a thread. In the morning Radhashyam Sir gave us sums of *odanka* addition and *phedanka* subtraction and *panikia* multiplication tables. The addition was done in this manner: 2 +2=4, 4+2=6, 6+2=8 etc. It could go further and further. Similarly

subtraction was done from ten viz: 10–2=8, 8–2=6, 6–2=4, 4–2=2 etc. and still going below. Like the monkey's ascending and descending on a pillar, the children were made to practise lessons. Oral recitation of addition and subtraction was done simultaneously with the writing on the slate. We used to erase the slate with our palms. Repeated erasing by palm, made the skin of the palm insensitive at places. We were getting by heart the multiplication tables from one to twenty-five. By the time we completed these lessons, Chai Master came back after his perambulation of the village. He began to interrogate us orally. Although these were meant to boost our knowledge of arithmetic, the sums of division and multiplication seemed to be irrelevant and of no practical use to us. I cite here an example of the sums Chai Master used to ask us: if the cost of one pumpkin was Rs. 250, what would be the cost of 250 pumpkins? After thirty or thirty-five years, although there have been repeated price rises, the cost of a pumpkin has not gone up so much. I doubt whether the price of a pumpkin would go up to Rs. 250 in Digaphandi.

It was not that our Chai Master alone was baffling us with such fantastic questions. The junior *Pandit* of The George V High School was also asking us such incongruous questions. He used to ask us to translate "Jawaharlal Nehru visited Taptapani yesterday" into English. There was no possibility of Nehru visiting Taptapani; nor did he ever really visit the spot. So it was beyond the comprehension of both Chai Master and the junior *Pandit*, that their questions bore no practical import.

There would be almost no one of my contemporaries in our village who had not been taught by Chai Master. Chai Master was very dear to my father. He was also an active member of Trinatha *Mela* group. So, I enjoyed a special status in my class. At about seven or seven thirty in the evening my father would arrive at the school. Chai Master would immediately say: "Let Dinanatha go home. Washing his feet and face with lukewarm water he would have his dinner." So out of fun, my friends in the school used to call me "warm water." I remember correctly that I studied in Chai Master's School, till I joined the High School.

I fairly recollect that almost half-a-dozen tuition centres were opened in my village then. But of all the centres Natabar Martha's tuition had earned renown. Martha Sir served as the drawing teacher in George V High School. His younger brother Brundavan was the chief tutor of this tuition centre, which was on the other side of the narrow lane where our house also stood. The atmosphere was resonant with the crowding voices of the students. Teaching was not the only avocation in Martha Sir's tuition centre. Besides, discussions on art, local politics, scene-painting, B.Ed. (bachelor in education) chart preparations were undertaken. Of course the students were not doing all these. A flight of narrow elongated steps like in the *Prahallada Nataka* led to the entrance of the tuition hall. Half of the twenty-two steps of the Puri Jagannatha temple were available there. On these steps many kinds of activities were performed. On the topmost stair there was the hair-cutting saloon of Trinatha Dakua. Beneath this step was the altar of Satyabadi Pujari. And below it were the open shops selling mangoes in summer and guavas, ladies' fingers and brinjals in other seasons. People of many castes crowded these stairs. To be precise, Martha Sir had total control over his tuition centre and had dedicated the stairs to the welfare of the Digapahandi people and one used to get the best example of neighbourly coexistence. Between the two apartments of the tuition centre, there was an open space which accommodated more than one hundred to one hundred and twenty students. Students from Class VII to matriculation could get admission.

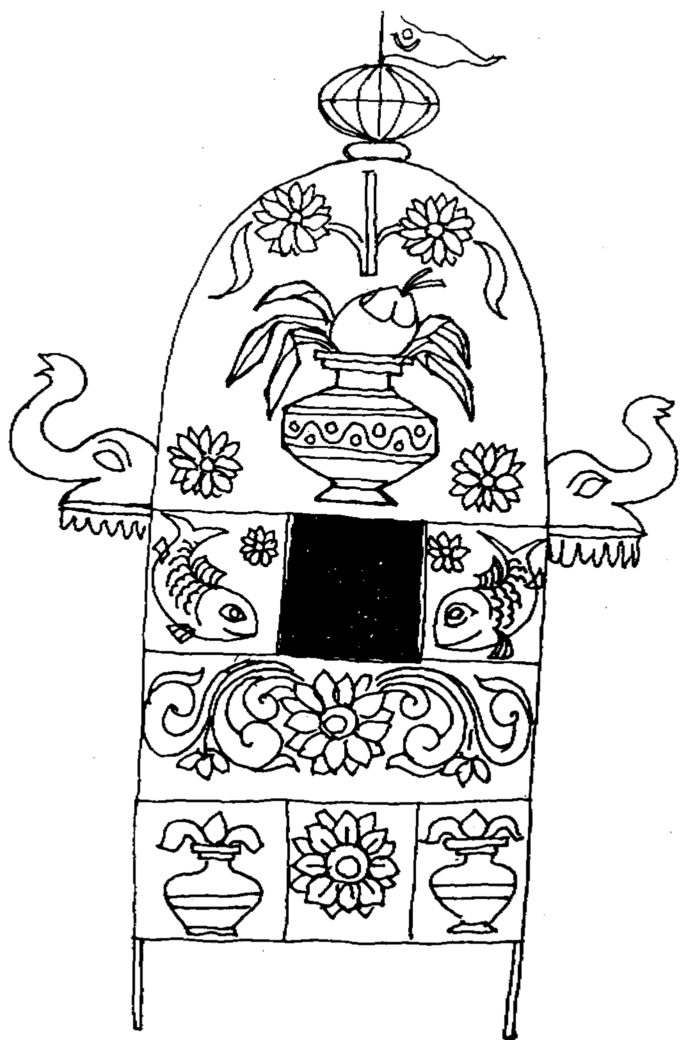
My mother got confused between tuition and junction. The students of this tuition centre caused our backyard area to lose its fertility by constantly urinating on it. The entire area became alkalined and muddy; and hence my father got annoyed with these students. At times, if accidentally he found someone urinating, he would scold and abuse the student.

I had to remain busy for dramas, theatres and *jatras*. So the tuition centre helped me a lot. Even if tuition was not necessary for me, my father at the request of Martha Master permitted me to attend the tuition. My performance in the school was quite satisfactory. So my presence in the tuition enhanced the prestige

of the centre. Besides, Martha Master was using me as his junior artist on many occasions. This gave me ample scope.

Judging from the standard of teaching, it won't be wrong to say that the centre was another school. We have learnt discipline, cooperation and commitment to work and humility from this centre. Every Sunday we used to wash the floor of the centre with cow-dung. Students in groups took turns to do this work. We collected money for purchasing kerosene to be used in the lanterns. If one who neglected in giving his share, we used to darken his side of the lantern by fitting a postcard over the glass blocking the source of light. Natabar Master was an expert in English and mathematics. We met him in the evening. We sat in a circle keeping the lantern at the centre and leaving a space for Sir. When the Drawing Sir came, the students maintained perfect discipline and silence, shrinking away like rats at the coming of the cat. He used to ask us to solve the difficult sums orally. One who made a mistake was slapped or got his ears twisted and twitched by the one who could answer right. Sometimes it happened that one who had given the right answer would squeeze everyone's ears and would harbour slaps. This procedure was also followed in answering the spellings of the English words. We had about seven to eight foolish students. For fear of slaps, they used to feed me and two or three friends of mine with *ragachana* spicy nuts, and *upama* from the tiffin shop of Jaga gudia. Spending an anna we used to be fed sumptuously. My evening tiffin was usually given to me by such students. Being sumptuously fed, we used to beat those students slightly and lightly. If Martha Sir happened to know about the tiffin and the strategy involved, he would call us and teach us how to implant slaps by asking another student to give us slaps. So we were carefully managing the contract, otherwise even after giving the right answer, our cheeks were reddened with slaps. As Martha Sir was my brother's friend and as I was somewhat his colleague as his junior artist, I never received the slaps. I was pardoned, despite committing mistakes and flaws.

I was benefitted the most as the tuition centre was very close to our house. Whenever I liked, I could come to our house. At the tuition centre a test was conducted just before the annual



examination in the school. There was no scope of copying at all. But when I faced any difficulty in solving sums, I took the plea of drinking water and used to come home. After verifying the sums at home from the notebook, I used to correct all the sums in the centre. The taking of attendance was very disciplined. Before sunrise, all of us would arrive at the tuition centre. Those who arrived late after sunrise, had their names serialised, and according to the serial they were given thrashings with the cane. The students who arrived before sunrise were spared from beating. Because of the proximity of our house I never failed to arrive at the centre before sunrise. At the approach of Ganesha Puja (Vinayaka Chaturthi) and Sarasvati *Puja* (Vasanta Panchami) Natabar Sir's tuition centre became clamorous and noisy. The daily routine in the tuition changed. Especially, a month before the Sarasvati *Puja*, students prepared notebooks to write down songs of *Sripanchami*. I cite here a few lines from those songs:

> On his arrival at Vrindaban
> Krishna was in merriment
> in the company of the *Gopis*.
> . . .
> One who is to be crowned with victory
> he gets the sacred coconut
> We are the students of
> Goddess Sarasvati.
> . . .
> O' Hari, God Murari, our adorations to thee.

In the afternoon, we used to learn those songs by heart. A decorated altar was created in the north-east corner of the tuition house. A shallow bamboo was split vertically into four pieces. Its joints were smoothened. On the diagonal of the two walls a seven to eight feet high Roman arch was made to stand vertically. It was made into three parts horizontally and four divisions vertically. The half-moon shaped portion at the top was covered with a coloured butter paper and the rest of the compartments were also covered with different shades of coloured paper. The compartment facing the niche was left open.

It was through this compartment that the goddess was visible. On top of the make-shift temple, the *amalaka, dadhinauti,* a pair of inverted parrots and a flag were fitted. On either side, the head of a *makara* drawn on a cardboard was pasted. The altar was then decorated with a stenciled motif of lotus, *sevati,* fish and an auspicious pitcher cut from coloured varnish papers. Martha Sir entrusted me with the decoration of this altar. I used to decorate the altar with the help of three or four friends of mine during Sarasvati and Ganesha *Puja*.

On the day before the *puja,* we used to collect lilies, chinarose flowers and a great variety of fruits like *bel*, guavas, oranges, bananas and green branches with bunches of leaves. The branches bearing fruits were hung from the iron hooks from the ceiling of the tuition house. The long stems of lily flowers were twisted like braids and along with coloured paper chains were hung from the ceiling. The atmosphere of the tuition house used to wear a dreamy glamour. All the students were sincere in the decoration work. On the day of Ganesha *Puja,* we woke up early, and wearing new pants and shirts we used to reach the tuition centre with *Sancha,* coconut and for the Sir and Madam *dhoti, gamuchha,* saree and blouse depending on our financial capabilities. At noon the *Puja* was performed. Natabar Sir performed the rituals. The offerings were stored in different baskets. We returned to our houses carrying a broken coconut shell, a few *bel* leaves and flowers and Natabar Sir's blessings. Our house used to receive three to four broken coconut shells from the tuition centre.

The significance of Sarasvati *Puja* was greater than that of Ganesha *Puja*. Martha Sir kept the celebrations on for a month intentionally. Decoration of the altar and offering of *Sancha* to the revered teacher were parts of the rituals in both Sarasvati *Puja* and Ganesha *puja*. Holding of the sacred coconut as the main programme used to influence the entire ritual of Sarasvati Puja. A week before the day of *puja,* coconuts with tuft of fibres on its head were collected. After removing the fibres from the body of the coconut, *Sri Sri Sri* was painted. To hold the sacred coconut our Sir selected the son of a rich man. It was the popular belief that one who would hold the sacred coconut, would study and

perform well in the examinations. Rich men eagerly permitted their children to hold the coconut. Martha Sir used to choose this boy carefully. Sir used to keep an eye on the prestige of the family and their relations and kith and kin. All were to be equally rich and renowned. Looking into the financial, familial, social, political and cultural status of the boy's family he used to select the boy. As there were so many compelling factors in the selection, I got no opportunity ever to hold the sacred fruit.

On the day of the Sarasvati *Puja,* we used to get up very early. We would then join the procession led by the drummers singing *Sripanchami* songs. We would arrive on the banks of *Badabandha,* where Martha Sir had buried the coconut. In the early hours of the winter morning, my body used to shiver. After our arrival on the bank, Martha Sir declared: "Luck and victory would be with him, he who would get the coconut." One who was destined, if he would dip in the water and search for the sacred coconut, he would surely get it. The appointed boy enters into the knee-deep water along with Natabar Sir. Sir moved his hand in the water close to the bank. Truly speaking all of a sudden, the boy would lift the coconut from the pond. The boy then was given new pants and shirt. His face was decorated with sandalwood paste. He would then be garlanded with *Itamala* flowers. Other students who had carried their new clothes to the pond, would put these on and would make themselves ready for the procession in two rows. On the *ghat,* the father of the lucky boy (who held the coconut) and his relatives would be present. I used to carry the marigold garland fitted cane staff in front of the procession. A boy holding the cane staff from another line would accompany me and between us the lucky boy holding the coconut close to his chest would move. The flower garland tied to the staff was kept inclined to the coconut. We two were the first and second monitors holding the cane. We sang aloud. All boys in the procession would repeat the song. The procession reached Natabar Sir's residence. We offered our salutations and prostrations to Sir and Madam. Then the procession would move towards the house of the lucky boy and it seemed as if waves of happiness entered the family. Martha Sir and we would become extremely hopeful and sing elegantly lengthening the tune. The

Sriphala coconut was received with flowers, sandalpaste and waving of lamps. The entire street overflows with the sound of *Hulahuli*. Plates full of *pithas* (cakes), *laddus* (rounded sweets), *jhilapi* bananas and coconuts were kept on the verandah in large brass plates. Saliva oozed out of our mouths, and we failed to sing with full concentration. Martha Sir passed instructions for distribution of sweets in small measures amongst the students. And whatever was left undistributed and those to come later belonged to Martha Sir. At times a cart load of paddy, *mung dal, harad dal*, a few pairs of *dhotis*, a pair of costly sarees, etc. were given as presents. Occasionally when Martha Sir felt quite discontented, he would say, "one who abandons shame in food and behaviour, he is the happiest." After the procession touches all the houses of the village related to the student holding *Sriphala* it would then proceed towards nearby villages to visit other relatives' houses. Of course. by then the procession became thin with only ten to twelve boys.

The richness, elegance, intimacy, love, affection, hospitality and the *guru-sishya* tradition of Sarasvati *Puja* and Ganesha *Puja* are missing now. The teacher-taught relationship has also undergone a sea change. The tuition centres are governed by a time-schedule and there is no human warmth. The invisible institutional bondage is cold these days. Neither is there Martha Sir nor Chai Master in the village these days. They have been entrapped in the flow of time. The tuition centre of Chai Master at the head of village pond is now in ruins. And Martha Sir's tuition centre is his family members' residence now. Satyabadi Pujari, Trinatha Dakua and many others are dead and gone. The stairs to the tuition centre wear a look of blank desertion. These days, whenever I go to my village, I feel like collecting the dust from those stairs and holding it to my forehead with an unspeakable sense of reverence.

THE THAKURANI JATRA

The *Thakurani Jatra* of Digapahandi resembled the great *Thakurani Jatra* of Berhampur. But unlike at Berhampur it was observed each year. The sacred pot was taken out in a procession from the Budhi-Thakurani's Temple situated at the end of *Sanadanda* Street. From the tenth day of *Aswina* (October), that sacred pot moved in a procession through the streets of the village. Apart from the main pots of *Budhi Thakurani, Sana Thakurani, Phula Sundari, Baidhar, Ghagudi Panchana,* the girls and married women who have made sacred avowals, came forward to join the procession bearing the sacred pots. The main pots were being borne by the *Padhan* women of *Odiya* street. They had been performing that ritual down the generations. On an elevated *mandapa* of the Thakurani temple, these pots were worshipped. Every pot was decorated with the fluid prepared from the rice paste over which turmeric and dots of vermilion were painted. A garland of chinarose was tied to the neck of the pot. At the dead of night preceding the *Jatra* the consecrated chinarose from the *Thakurani's* crown was made to leap into the sacred pot by the spell of *mantras.* Whether the chinarose really made a leap into the sacred pot amid the pungent incense and curling smoke of (*jhuna*) resin or the *jani* amidst the thick layer of smoke in the sanctum of the temple places the flower inside the pot, was impossible to say. "No one would invite a bull to hit him." Similarly no one interfered in the rituals performed in the *Thakurani's* temple. Who would like to die of cholera? In the middle of the night, hundreds of devotees and spectators would stand circumscribing the *Mandapa.* Suddenly there would be an uproar that the flower started leaping from the deity's crown into the sacred pot. Surely the consecrated chinarose must have made a leap. Under the spell of an invisible awe and reverence, the hands go above the heads folded in *Anjali Mudra.* The *Sanadanda*

went clamorous with the sound of bells, conches, *mrudangas* and *hulahulis.*

There was a fixed itinerary for the *Thakurani* to move procession through specified streets on specific evenings. The procession was elegant and gorgeous. In front of the procession, dancers in processional masks portraying different characters such as snake charmer and his enchantress, *Kela* and *Keluni* and horse move ahead, performing their colourful dance. At the beatings of *changu,* these dancers used to perform vigorous dances. Behind this troupe of dancers, there were the umbrella, *Trasa* and shaft bearers followed by conch blowers, pipers and



drummers. In the middle there were the women servants appointed by Ganesha *Bhaina* to carry petromax lights. Behind these women was *Budhi Thakurani.* Close to this main pot there were people who held an applique fan, flywhisk, and the *Jani* of the *Thakurani* holding peacock feathers. Following them were the devotees and *sevakas.* Layers of turmeric were pasted on the sacred pots. Garlands made from lotus, water lily, chinarose, and marigold encircled the pots. When the eldest daughter-in- law of the *Pradhan* family joined the procession carrying the main pot, it appeared as if *Budhi Thakurani* herself had manifested in her persona. As if she had appeared in the procession to pay heed to the prayers of the devotees. As soon as the women from *Pradhan* families place these ritual pots on their heads the *Thakurani* gets possessed. With the smoke and smouldering incense the eyes of these women turned red. *Jani* smears their foreheads with vermilion. The *Pradhan* woman then had a real look at *Thakurani.* She came under the spell of *Thakurani's* kindness and mystery.

An unusual sensation ran through her body and she began to sway and the pot on her head also wavered. Other pots got inducted to such sensations and these pots also began to sway. Other avowed pots and the baskets of flowers began to move and sway to the tune of processional music. The devotees, because of their blind faith would say: "What a strange miracle of the *Thakurani.* There is no end to her *Maya.*" Even if I was sceptical of all these ritualistic practices, I had no courage to utter a word. A group of young boys including myself used to walk beside the *Thakurani* in the procession. It was indeed great fun for us and we loved to inhale the smoke of the sacred resin.

Before the procession of the *Thakurani* is taken out, a drummer goes around the village announcing the arrival of *Budhi Thakurani* to their locality. People are alerted to wash and clean their doorsteps and prepare the offerings. Some took care in cleaning the street much before the evening. They would even not hesitate to decorate the floor with coloured powders. At about eleven or twelve at night the procession would arrive. At that moment some villagers must have had their quota of sleep. Listening to the sound of the drum the devotees would leave

their beds yawning, and rubbing their sleepy eyes some would come out with the plates of offerings and the ghee lamp. Some who were poverty-stricken and helpless would offer their simple salutations to the deity without offering anything in kind.

I distinctly recollect a funny incident. The *Thakurani* was passing through the *Badadanda* towards the palace. Hearing the sound ot drums, bells, and the pipe, an old woman of *Padhan* family came out of her bed, a kerosene lamp on her hand. She did not have anything to offer to the deity. The *Thakurani* was walking in the procession with a swaying movement. Suddenly the Goddess stopped in front of the house of that old woman. She was puzzled. Every one was worried. Certainly some irregularities had taken place in *Thakurani's* rituals. The bearers moved the fans and whisks faster. *Jani* brought the pot of fire close to the *Thakurani* and put two three handfuls of resins into it. The entire *Badadanda* was flooded with the scent of resin and incense. *Jani* fell prostrated at the feet of the *Thakurani*. He appealed with folded hands: "O' Mother, save us. If there was any irregularity, please forgive us, O'Mother. Save your own children. O' my dear Mother of the universe; Mother of *Bada Khemandi Gadachandi*. You are our only hope. Kindly become quiet and contented." The *Thakurani* who had been hitherto standing silent suddenly spoke : "I could smell the kerosene oil from your lamp. Offer me a ghee lamp. give me a *bodah* (a black he goat for sacrifice). Don't commit any mistake or irregularity. I would turn the entire village into black poles." In fact, three kerosene lamps were offered to the deity at the doorsteps. The black pole incidents are not of much significance in Digapahandi. Even without the *Thakurani's* wrath, the *Khandia Sahi* got burnt almost annually. If the *Badadanda* would catch fire, it would lead to infinite misery. We could not tolerate *Thakurani's* unkind decision. We a group of boys were accompanying Gokul *Bhaina* (Gokul Chandra Mekap) in the procession. Gokul *Bhaina* was extremely sharp. He immediately spoke up: "Are the petromax lights on either side of *Thakurani* filled with ghee? How could the *Thakurani* smell kerosene only from the lamp?" All of us began to repeat the words of Gokul *Bhaina* at high pitch. Our words struck

the ears of *Jani* and the *Thakurani*. *Jani* with anger began to shout: "Round up these young atheist boys." A host of *Thakurani's* devotees were tossing their heads after a heavy round of country liquor. By the time they yelled: "Rascals, who are they?" all of us came back home running. Gokul *Bhaina* also came back with us. Investigations revealed that the woman of the *Padhan* family who was carrying the ritual *Thakurani* pot and the old lady did not get on well. And that their relationship was not very cordial, as one was the daughter-in-law of the other old lady.

If the offerings in front of a particular house were elegant and delicious, the *Thakurani* would gleefully stand there and would bestow blessings on the family with a smile. She would ask then if there were any riddles to be unravelled. A group of boys after having failed in the matriculation examination more than six times, were busy loitering in the village and they were creating a nuisance. Suddenly they would ask: "Will Sambaria pass the matriculation examination this time?" The *Thakurani* would answer promptly: "Sacrifice a black goat. He will surely succeed." Sambaria's father would invite all the villagers and make arrangements for the sacrifice. Then a good feast would take place. Much before Sambaria's result was declared, the *Thakurani Jatra* would be over.

Ten to fifteen days before the *Thakurani's* ritual pots procession, people appear in various costumes and make up with costumes of *jhilapi vesa* (one kind of fancy dress with *jhilapi* in hands), Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman, Kali and the one who would bury his head inside a pit known as *Mundapota*. These people pick up these figures in accordance with their prior avowal or promise. Whatever they collected moving round the villages would be given to the *Thakurani*.

I remember clearly that my friend, Natabar Martha's brother-in-law, Balaram Panda and I were dressed as Rama and Lakshmana. Moving around the villages, we could collect twelve annas and two pots of rice at the end of the day. We learnt by heart one song and repeated the same song in every house. By the time one or two stanzas were sung, we were getting a few coins or rice. This was the song that we sang:

Raghunath moves around the forest
In search of his Sita, the dearest,
wailing: O' where have you gone my nearest
O' Sita...etc.

The artistic skill in the decoration of the chariots of the *Thakurani Jatra* was really praise worthy. From every street the chariots were set out for the village procession. In front of the palace on the *Badadanda* these chariots were kept on display for four to five days. A definable competitive spirit was discernible in the decoration of these chariots, even if no prizes were given. Chariots which were elegantly decorated earned everyone's praise. People in every street took utmost care in decorating their chariots. These chariots bore the look of Lord Jagannatha's chariot but were much smaller. The painted wooden images of Kartikeya, Kali, Durga, etc. were placed on them. These idols were ten to fifteen feet in height. It was because of the *Chitrakara* Prahallada Mahapatra that the images of the Santrasahi's chariot were extremely life-like. Mahapatra made wooden carvings in traditional Odissi style. On the image he used layers of sawdust, mixed with gum from the paste of tamarind seeds. He would then cover the images with old cloth and smoothen them with repeated rubbings. He was painting them in *Pata* style with primary colours and dressing them in colourful costumes. After the *jatra*, these idols were preserved in the temples or *Maths*. This tradition no longer exists. The artists from Cuttack who prepared clay images have already given the people the flavour of *Kalakunja*. On the pretext of oriental style, fanciful images resembling the characters of Hindi films are now being made for the *Thakurani Jatra*. The traditional Odissi images have become tasteless, and irrelevant for the educated and half-educated youth. It is certainly a matter of deep regret.

Regarding the processional itinerary, there had been conflicts between Santara street and Brahmin street. It was because of the professional rivalry that existed between Prahallada Mahapatra of Santara street and Lokanath Pathy of Brahmin Street. Although from caste considerations, we were not painters, still we had chosen it to be our profession. My father was not mainly

in the art profession yet he was involving himself in many art activities like the puppet-dance, assembly of ghosts, etc. He was accompanying his bosom-friend, my foster father who possessed a thousand wooden toys and puppets. Both of them at times used to organise the puppet dance and set up ghost-assemblies during the *jatra,* and these proved more attractive than Prahallada Mahapatra's idols Kali, Durga, etc. The ghosts were skeletal, rickety with yawning faces, bulging eyes, protruding tongues and teeth, dishevelled matted locks, dark and dreadful, capable of creating a frightening look. More often these elicited greater admiration from one and all.

My father used to say that Prahallada Mahapatra's elder brother was his friend. He was his competitor in the field of art. Once my father suggested to Mahapatra to make a rare image in the *jatra* as it would create a sensation. He suggested making a chariot of Christ which would be unique. The British rule was very much in exitence then. He intended the figure of Christ to be presented in a manner that would be enough of a slap on the face for British rulers. An innovation indeed. It was decided that my father would take up the responsibility of decoration. A wooden cross was made from two poles with a small base. Despite Mahapatra's unwillingness, my father made him stand on the cross, binding his limbs across it. The chariot was drawn to the *Badadanda.* The front screen of the chariot was opened. Everybody appreciated the innovative idea and gave Mahapatra due credit. Mahapatra was simply delighted. At that moment my father loosened the towel which Mahapatra had put on, and as a result, whatever was missing in Jesus Christ's figure was fulfilled. And Mahapatra now a semi-nude was hung helplessly against the cross. Mahapatra realised his folly and accepted the defeat, so much so that he decided not to enter into competition with Brahmin street.

After many years of this incident, *Bhaina* thought of a new plan. Three different types of chariots would accompany us. These were the chariots of Trinatha *Mela,* Bakasura *Badha,* and Sita's chariot in the *Ashoka* grove. The significance of the chariot of Trinatha *Mela* was that the entire temple could be hung from

the shoulders of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, although all of them were walking.

With the help of artificial legs, they appeared to be seated in the temple. As they were walking, swaying from one side to another, it seemed as though a small chariot was moving. The lower portion of the temple was covered with a decorative cloth which could hide the feet of these gods.

Joining two bullock carts, the chariot of Bakasura *Badha* was planned. With the help of bamboo stripes, a huge crane was made to sit on the chariot. *Dhotis* were collected from the village to cover up the body of the crane. The beaks were fitted with such tact that the crane could comfortably open its mouth. The head of the crane was like a globe eight feet in diameter. Within this globe, my friend Bijaya Chandra Adhikari dressed as blue-bodied Krishna, was asked to sit. Bijaya was healthy and handsome. And so the dress of Krishna suited him. When Bijaya entered into the head of the crane as Krishna, his parents began to be apprehensive and cried aloud as they thought that he might be suffocated. Perhaps in *Dwapara Yuga,* Nanda and Yashoda shouted in this manner. The chariot was drawn to the main street. When the crane opened up its beak, Krishna was seen playing on his flute in an aura of red electric light that splashed the interior. The people of the village never witnessed before the display of such a chariot.

For the third chariot a different strategy was employed. On a cart, the two wheels connected by the main supporting axle were placed and turned upside down. The wheels were placed in such a manner that the top wheel could rotate. On the spokes of the wheels masked devils were seated. The cart was decorated with the branches of trees. It created an illusion of the forest. Very close to the wheel, Sita sat resting her hands against her cheeks. The cart moved on and with it the wheel too rotated. It appeared as if, Sita was sitting in the *Ashokavana* surrounded by demons.

These days the *Thakurani Jatra* in Digapahandi has been converted into a community Durga *puja*. It is learnt that in lieu of the chariots, they are now putting up temporary exhibition stalls with painted clay images called *Kalakunja*.

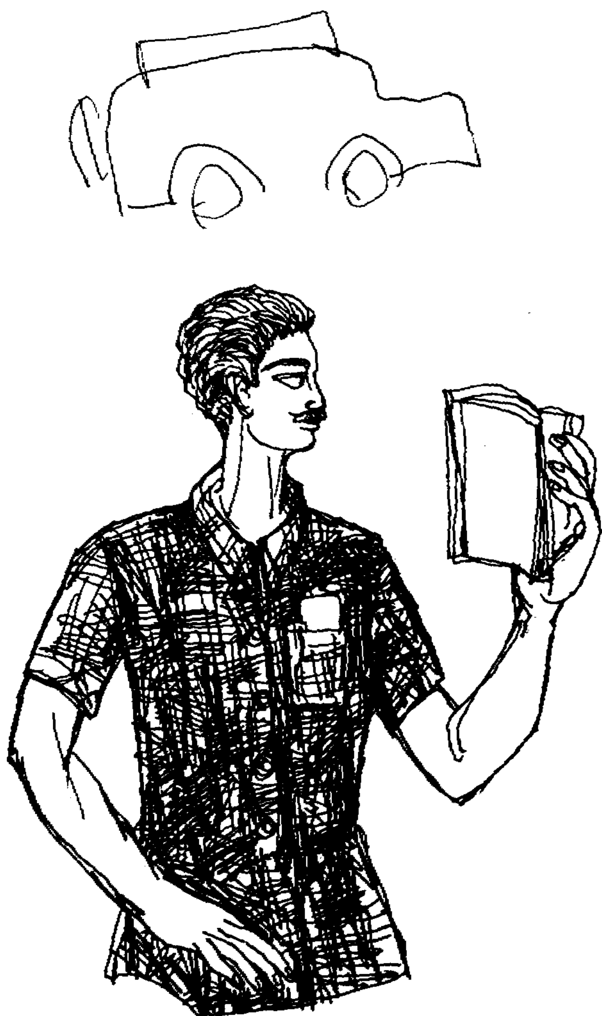
I remember distinctly yet another interesting incident of *Thakurani* entering into the body of the devotee. I had known it from my father. At the turn of *Sasana* street, a woman of the *Padhan* family used to live. She was a widow at an early age. She lived on daily wages. She sustained herself by carrying loads of paddy from the field to the store. In the evenings when the dormant sex desire surfaced, she pretended being possessed by *Thakurani*, threw away her saree, loosened her braid and began to dance wildly. The people who passed by that street would halt to watch the funny scene. Whether she pretended to have come under the influence of *Thakurani's* spirit or was a case of sexual perversion, could not be ascertained. A group of people believed honestly that she was under *Thakurani's* magic spell. Other people thronged there to stand witness to the fun. Ratha of *Sasana* street, a pious Brahmin, could not stand such a sight. His wife was long dead. A straightforward man, what he planned only God knows. Once he rushed into the house of the *Padhan* family in the guise of Lord Shiva, a *trisula* (trident) in his hand. All were taken aback. No one had the courage to detain him.

In a thunderous voice, he declaimed: "Rascal woman, (she was Shiva's wife), I'm tired of wandering across the graveyard. When I come back home, I would have to tolerate your haughtiness and bad temper." Beating the woman with his trident, he dragged her to the kitchen holding her loosened hair. "Foolish woman, go and cook. What will my sons, Ganesha and Kartikeya eat?" Uttering these words, he thrashed her back heavily with his trident. The pretentious woman was set right by Ratha. All her haughtiness and temper was over. Putting on her clothes, the woman of the *Padhan* family would light the hearth. Whenever this woman of the *Padhan* family behaved in this manner, Ratha would repeat his usual game. After one or two such occasions the woman was no more under *Thakurani's* spell.

GEORGE V HIGH SCHOOL

In independent India such a name might sound odd and incongruous. But it is a fact that till we studied up to Class IX or X, our school was dear to us in that alien name. To the south of the village on the same street which housed Chai Master's Tuition, George V High School stood at the fag end under a huge tile-roofed house retaining the century's old heritage. A stone wall ran around the school. Beneath the tile-thatched roof of the school, there was the wide verandah and round twin-pillars that could not be held with one's full embrace. It had five to six rooms wherein students from Class VIII to XI studied. Within the boundary wall there were two more tile-roofed blocks. One contained the office of the headmaster, Sri Ramanarayan Padhy, and the other block was the office of the head clerk, Kama Sir, science rooms, teachers' common room, art room, etc. Later on four thatched semi open-halls were added to the southern boundary of the school. There the students from Class IV to Class VII were taught. In the open field situated between the thatched halls and the teachers' common room our prayers were conducted. Adjacent to the western boundary wall, there were the theatre stage and the pit. Beyond the western boundary wall, was the playground, one end touching the banks of the huge pond and the other two ends getting lost in the vast expanse of rice fields. Just beyond the main gate of the school there was the office of the sub-registrar. Towards the right side of the sub-registrar's office there was the King's old *kachery* (office), which has been converted into the Khemandi College these days. To the north of the sub-registrar's office there was the hostel of the High School. Opposite the hostel, was Sripad Sir's tuition centre.

I had studied from Class IV to matriculation in this school. Now there is a marked change in the appearance of the school.



Many new buildings have come up, setting aside the old antique houses of the school. The George V High School has been renamed the Badakhemandi High School. Yet whenever I remember my school days, the image of the tile-roofed house comes to my mind, trailed by the memory of Sri, Ramanarayan Padhy, the Headmaster. He almost enjoyed the powers of a District Collector. Indeed a powerful personality. Students were mortally afraid of him, as though he were a tiger. Tall, light-skinned with curling hair and a pair of impressive moustaches, eyes slightly bluish, he was undaunted, affectionate, student-loving, and hardworking. He taught us English: "Down down, down went Alice into the rabbit hole." When he recited "Down, down, down," he almost descended from the chair. He had the ability to identify the naughty, mischievous and the foolish students in the very first reading. It was extremely difficult to escape his notice in case of any mischief. He would promptly order: "Agadhu, get the canes." Agadhu, his peon, with rims of extra fat around the neck, chest and abdomen would carry a bundle of canes to him. Then he would begin his beating till the students bled. Of course such punishment is not possible anywhere other than in the police station. No, not at all in the schools these days. There was none to raise his voice against Sri Ramanarayan Padhy. Ramanarayan Padhy, Shyama Sundar Padhy, the village *karji* and Balaji Raju kept the education, culture and politics of the village under their full control.

His mode of going to the toilet was notable and could be mentioned comfortably in the Guinness Book of World Records. For the morning motion he consumed two dozen Capstan cigarettes. He would light one cigarette when starting from his house. He would cover almost three to four kilometres to reach the Inspection Bungalow's field. He would light one after the other. One can call it chain smoking. Without caring for the winter or rain, he would walk down the distance and smoke would be coming from his mouth as from a rail engine. The smell of Capstan tobacco would spread through the village, making it intoxicated too.

When we were in the school, it had two buses. With the

money earned through the bus service, the school was run. Whenever the driver fell ill or was absent, the headmaster would drive the bus. Parking the bus at the junction, he would come to the school. Teaching English for a period, he would go back to the junction to drive the bus—from the studies to the steering!

Out of Ramanarayan Padhy's mercy I was a recipient of a free scholarship all my school days. Almost on all the occasions such as school dramas, Ganesha *puja*, Sarasvati *puja* and Independence Day, I would be wanted by the Headmaster. This amounted to a lot for me in terms of my respect before other students. I received medals for three consecutive years from Keshav Maharana's Drawing Masters' Association for my paintings. So the Headmaster loved me dearly. Till he joined the post of Joint Secretary of the Board of Secondary Education, Orissa, he had been reminding me of those awards whenever we met. After Ramanarayan Padhy, it was Sanatana Pujari, the Assistant Head-master who taught us science, geography and English non-detailed book. For every chapter in geography, he used illustrated charts and maps. He asked me to prepare those charts. Sanatana Pujari's ability to draw was excellent. Had he been our drawing teacher, it would have been better. Hitherto I haven't seen any teacher preparing such excellent charts. I always secured very good marks in geography. I stood first in the class. Geography has now become one of the units of social science—a hotch-potch mixture. That is why when you ask the students to show the Himalayan range they would look towards Kerala.

Headmaster Ramanarayan Padhy was a strict disciplinarian. However, Sanatana Pujari on the other hand, was very tender, and a devotee of Swami Nigamananda. He used to play the violin well. He was very sentimental and withdrawn. If he came late to the school, he would tender his C.L. application to Agadhu at the gate and go away. If the cat chased a chameleon, he would restrain the cat from such an act of violence. When Sanatana Sir remained in charge of the Headmaster in the absence of Ramanarayan Sir, it would be a day of fun for all of us. Two groups of boys would approach the Headmaster in

charge and request him to have a volleyball match or a football match. After a little introspection he would say, "One ball and two groups of boys. Just wait for some time, let me consult Gurudev (Nigamananda) about this matter. He would escape into his room, and come out a little later. "Gurudev has refused to let you play today," he would announce. I could not yet forget the two indecisions he took. The first one was to determine the gender of the skeleton. The second one was about the handwritten non-detailed book.

Once, Sanatana Sir was teaching science to us. Hanging a skeleton, he was explaining the anatomy of the human body. Bhimasen Patra of my street and a friend of mine, stood up and enquired whether the skeleton was male or female? With this question, Sanatana Sir became unbelievably angry. Bhima had to pocket a lot of abuse in English and was driven out of the class. Undoubtedly, Bhima's question was relevant and quite scientific.

The second episode was that of my writing down the non-detailed book. I had neatly written down the entire book entitled *Letters from a Father to His Daughter*, using Indian ink, taking all care. It is known as calligraphy. The book had a nice look and get-up. I should have been congratulated for this magnificent work. But just the opposite happened. At the time of reading, somehow Sir could know that my book was not a printed one. He got the book from me, had a look at it, and then threw it away. The incident wounded me deeply. I felt slighted. But I had no courage then to ask why he had thrown the book away.

Long after the incident in 1973, I had been to Boirani (Kavi Surya Nagar) to take permission from the S.D.O. to carry the marble statue of Sona Minchin from the old Sugar Factory at Aska. Sanatan Sir was then strolling on the verandah of the High School in front of the S.D.O's office. I thought of meeting him. He was very happy to see me. He took me to his room. Many old incidents of my school days crept into our discussion. I reminded him of the throwing of my non-detailed book. Sir admitted his mistake and expressed his grief. But I had no intention to make him feel aggrieved.

Natabar Patnaik was a strong pillar of the George V High

School. He was the seniormost person, hard working, disciplined and principled. He was tall with a sword like sharp nose. Bony face and shrunken eyes. He used to come to school keeping an umbrella in his armpit. He taught us up to Class VII. It was not easy to escape from his clutches. While teaching, if there was any urgency of sending someone to his house, he would ask the boy to come to him and explain, "Go straight from school to the bazar. Then taking the left lane you would arrive in front of Dadhivamaǹ temple of *Sanadanda*. Then go straight to the east. After crossing half the distance, you would see to the left a house with a high verandah. In front of the house there will be *Tagara* plants and stone stairs. Going up to the verandah, turn to the right and knock at the door with the help of the iron chain (fitted on the door). My uncle will open the door. You tell him that I had sent you. On the tin box kept in the sleeping room, there will be my blue covered notebook. On the notebook I have left the dark coloured cover of my glasses. Getting it, you come soon." Most of the students were from Digapahandi. Who would face difficulty in doing the job, after such description? But Natabar Sir would like to know from the student what exactly he said and how much of that he had remembered. What else could the student do? He would once again repeat. By mistake if he missed any detailed description such as that of the flower plants or of the stone stairs, he would have to repeat the same from the beginning. Students were mortally afraid of Natabar Sir. If any drama was to be staged in the school, Headmaster, Ramanarayan Padhy would give the charge of the green room to Natabar Sir. Natabar Martha Sir, *Bhaina* and I would remain in charge of make-up. Forgetting is the instinctive quality of artists. When they were engaged in any assignment, they would do it with all their hearts. But once the work was done, they would misplace the brush and colour. Natabar Sir would not spare anyone. He must have remembered it well if he had given even a needle to someone. Getting the needle to sew the dress, I would misplace it. It was caught by Natabar Sir whenever I misplaced the needle. He would warn me and then say: "Dinanath, take the needle this time. But if you don't return it, you won't get it once again." He

was very affectionate. And that is why he did not have any objection to violate the rule he framed in case of necessity.

Pandit Durgamadhab or the junior Pandit was always busy collecting the straw, rice-water, and chaff dust for his cows. He used to discuss all this even while teaching. He would remind someone: "Chitta, what happened to those straws? Tell your father to send a cartload of straw to my backyard." I have never heard him discussing literature.

My intimacy with Natabar Martha Sir was deep. I helped him a lot. Starting from the colouring of doors and windows of the school, to painting the blackboard, I helped him. In case of necessity, I helped him to prepare charts and maps, making the images of Ganesha and Sarasvati, decorating the school rooms, arranging exhibitions during the visit of any minister or officer. I used to assist him in preparing welcome arches and gates. Almost in all kinds of activities I helped him. I had free access to Natabar Sir's art room.

I did not have white half pants and a white banian. I faced difficulties in the games period on every Saturday. As I was faring well in my studies, neither the teacher nor any student had any objection to my participation in the game. In case of urgency, I had to pin my *gumuchha* to give the shape of a banian. But often instead of asserting my right for the game, I had chosen to withdraw voluntarily. After the rain, when the field was filled with water, a group of unfortunate boys would go into the field to play football. My friend Durgamadhab Das is now an O.A.S. (Orissa Administrative Service) officer. Perhaps he is the *tehasildar* of Banapur these days. He was a good football player. Even he was afraid of playing with us in the rain-washed field as instead of playing the ball, we engaged ourselves in mud kicking. Broadly and honestly speaking, I had no talent in games. As I could shout at the top of my voice, my friends often selected me to be the referee in the volleyball matches. There was no difficulty on the part of a referee to conduct the game even putting on a rustic towel. I discharged my duties well without any difficulty.

NATA PUNJA

Theatre Groups

I was intimately involved with the theatre groups in and around our village. These theatre groups performed Prahallada Nataka, Radha-Prema Lila, Krishna Lila, etc. Prahallada Nataka was gorgeous and attractive. Karnataka classical *rag* influenced its music greatly. The costumes used by the characters in this *Nataka* resembled those of Kathakali dance. An heightened altar made up of wooden planks constituted the main set in Prahallada Nataka. This heightened stepped altar is made accessible through the wooden stairs. It looked like the throne of legendary king Vikramaditya. On the top most wooden plank, a nicely carved, wooden chair was placed for Hiranya, the main character of the play. On the so-called throne Hiranya used to spend most of his time. He was flanked by his son Prahallada and wife Lilavati who stood there with folded hands.

Moving up and down the steps of this high stage, these characters exhibit their actions through multiple postures and gestures. At times Hiranya took liberties to jump from the stage to three steps down on the floor and at times he used to make a leap to the stage by passing a few steps. Sometimes lifting his throne he would come down and go up in order to exhibit his valour and bravery. It was not surprising therefore that one who witnessed the play for the first time would certainly christen it circus rather than a play. In the course of acting, Hiranya would allow Lilavati and Prahallada to sit on his thighs and begin to make conversation endearingly. Sometimes he would lovingly touch Lilavati's cheeks and say, "O my dear." An additional wooden plank was kept beneath Hiranya's throne to rest his feet.



At the time of singing songs, he used to thrash his feet on this plank creating a noise. This noise drew the attention of the sleeping and yawning audience to the proceedings of the play. In the right hand Hiranya held a wooden cutlass, and in the left a

handkerchief. He wore a *ghagara,* and a dress made up of lace. On the head he wore a *kiriti,* made up of dazzling tinsels. The *ghagara* was stitched with colourful cloth, in such a manner that it gave the look of a stepped pyramid. It dangles from the waist to the feet and gave the appearance of puffed up bell-bottom pants. Prahallada used a similar small *ghagara.* Clasping his palms across his chest, Prahallada would stand in salutation to the king, and a handkerchief would be flown from between his palms. Lilavati's dress was a little different. She would be wearing a pink or violet *Brahmapuripata* with folds. She covered her bosom with a colourful printed blouse and on her waist, the girdle. She had put a small crown on her head with a long plait dangling at her back. We usually prepared the *kiriti,* crowns, masks and dresses used in this play. It took two to three months to prepare one *kiriti.* The dazzling tinsels, spring lace, dotted and glazed papers and *pohala* (imitation coral) used in the preparation of all the items of the play, we purchased from Berhampur. The large size *kiritis* were three feet high. Since it used to sit tight on the head like a cap, it was known as *topi kiriti.* At first we prepared the structure of the cap by using gum, paper and cloth. Then we used to sew the decorative *zari* work by hand. On the *sikhara* of the *kiriti,* there would be an umbrella. On either side of the *Amalaka,* were two inverted parrots. At the *Beki,* on either side, were heads of two *Magaras.* Along with the preparation of the *kiriti,* we used to undertake the responsibility of preparing armlets, wristlets, waist belts, *alaka patis* (anklet) and *sevati* flowers. In those days we used to receive Rs. 200-300 per set as remuneration. We also made a cutlass, mace, mask of Ganesha and of Nrushingha. The role of the Nrushingha mask in this play was of great significance. Usually the Nrushingha mask was four to five feet high. It was not easy to dance putting this mask on. In the *akhada* (rehearsal) hall of the village this mask was preserved and worshipped as a deity throughout the year. It was during the enactment of this play alone that the mask was brought out. It was structured on the ground with the help of a clay model. After covering it with cloth and paper, the mould was taken off

from the ground and left in the sun to dry. Since it was worshipped as an image it was given water-colour. But at times we painted it with the help of enamel. The villagers and the people involved in the play were more or less aware of the impact of this mask. It was believed that after putting on this mask, a terrific vigour would generate in him and he would no longer remain a human being. He got himself transformed into a lion in the human form. There is no second opinion with regard to the power and impact of the mask. But because of the excessive drinking by the character who put on the mask, he committed inhuman and irrational acts. There are instances of individuals who after putting on the mask did face death instantly. My *Bhaina* explained the reasons for such deaths. Because of year-long preservation of the mask in the *Akhada* hall, scorpions did build a nest in it. The moment it was used, all at once, fifteen to twenty scorpions would sting, and so the mask-wearing character did face death. The scorpions could easily live in the cavity of the mask's long nostrils, building their nests. After such an accident caused by a scorpion sting it was given a different picture. It was believed that the death occurred because of the divine influence. There is still another instance in which the Nrushingha character putting on the mask could tear open the character of Hiranya into pieces in reality. Such cases can be attributed to earlier enemity or to the excessive drinking frenzies. So before the appearance of Nrushingha on the stage, the organisers would warn the audience. On his waist thick ropes would be tied and ten to fifteen people would be holding the rope from behind to keep under control. Without performing any acting, simply appearing on the stage the character used to disappear in the green-room. We initiated certain new items in the Prahallada Nataka. These were the apearance of Ganesha on the back of a rat, on the stage, and display of incarnations through slides.

To paint the face of Hiranya a paste of vermilion and castor-oil was used. After dressing Hiranya with lace garments, we used to implant fur of a bear on his chest and on his face to give

the impression of beards. Besides, the brass moustache, black goggles on the eyes, and a wig was used to make him up. Lilavati used to put on *dandi* (pendant), *guna* (nose ring) on her nose, *jhumpi* (earrings) on her ears, waist plate on the waist, armlet and *khadu* (bracelets) on her arms, rings on her feet, etc. Imitating



Hindi film heroines, the present-day Lilavati has abandoned Odissi ornaments.

In Prahallada Nataka, the characters sing songs based on *Karnatak raga*. To sing these *Karnatak ragas,* they used to practise a great deal before singing on the stage. In such plays there was no provision of prompting from behind. So the characters used to learn the song by heart. They used to have the rehearsal in *Akhada,* the community hall for years. A character sang a stanza and another repeated the same, when he exhibited their gestures and postures. I cite here examples of a stanza:

Surely I would put an end to your life,
Pray to whomever you like for protection.
Don't you know my valour and bravery
Easily I can conquer the Gods in heaven.
With my spurn, the three universes tremble,
I would see, who would save thee, etc.
Gods, demons, Indra, Vayu, Kurvera
All get terrified with my mere appearance.

When two theatre groups were engaged in a competition, it was on the character of Hiranya that the importance was given. Much pressure was there on this character. It was because of the fact that the King Hiranya from one group would sing a stanza from a song, allowing the King Hiranya of the other group to determine the tune and *raga* of the song. If the king could determine the *raga* and satisfy the other group by his answer, it was good. If he failed, it was treated as his defeat like that of a batsman being declared out after he was caught. So the king's character or the character of Hiranya were supposed to know all the *ragas,* and *talas* otherwise he was sure to be the victim of insult and censure.

I got opportunities to visit many villages of South Orissa in the group of Prahallada Natak. As the organisers and actors were farmers, they used to proceed by bullock-carts after nine or ten in the night towards the village that had given an advance to perform the play. Four to five carts were used to carry the

necessary equipment of the stage and drama. After the arrival of the troupe, the villagers had the head-count. Then they would begin to cook. They used to serve coarse rice, *Mung dal Ambila* (a sour dish prepared out of pumpkin, brinjal, arum and tamarind). After midnight the play was enacted. Hiranya forces Prahallada not to chant the names of Hari. He would shout at the top of his voice: "O the gem of my son abandoning the name of Hari, chant only the name of Shiva." In response to this dialogue, Prahallada would reply very loudly but with affection: "O my Dad. Sri...Ha....ri. I cannot chant Shiva's name, abandoning Hari's." From this exchange of the dialogues between Hiranya and Prahallada it appeared that a lion was roaring and pouncing on a rabbit and the rabbit, unperturbed and unagitated, was facing the challenge, and leaping to face the battle. At last Hiranya would become frustrated at the invincible obstinacy of his own son and would inflict on him severe punishments. At this point, in particular, the competition between the two groups would become acute. Each would try to exhibit in a much exaggerated way various punishments inflicted on Prahallada. Annointing their bodies with castor oil, muscles glistening like the wrestlers in a circus, well-built young men excel one another in awarding punishment to Prahallada. Carrying a *dhenki* (a heavy rice pounding wooden instrument) on their shoulders, they encircle the performing arena. Holding and rotating a wheel of a bullock-cart like a muscle man of the MRF-type cutout, they would move on the stage in order to exhibit their strength. Imitating the feats of, circus party that came to perform a circus from Berhampur, they would forcibly place Prahallada within a wooden box and would insert the sharp swords into the box. But by the grace of God, Prahallada would emerge from the box smiling without the slightest injury. The village women showing their anxieties are seen wiping their tears with the ends of their sarees, from the time, the swords are inserted into the box till Prahallada comes out of the box smiling. These women would then offer their thanks and regards to the almighty Hari with their hands folded. In order to frighten Prahallada further, a group of snake-

charmers were kept on hire on the stage. I cite here an interesting incident.

A certain American university professor in drama and theatre art, while making reserch on cultural relations of Kalinga and Indonesia came to know about Prahallada Nataka, and he became interested in it. Incidentally he happened to come down to me. On his request for witnessing the Prahallada Nataka in the villages of Ganjam district, I sent word to my artist friend, Bishwabihari Khadanga, the drawing teacher of Dharakote High School. Bishwabihari took the foreign scholar round the villages and showed him the play being staged. In order to please the white saheb, the villagers took an interest in performing the play with all their skill and excellence. They got a cobra without removing its poisonous tooth. The play started. The wrestler was a young man of twenty-two. While acting, he was bitten by the cobra, and he met his death. Even if it was the most tragic incident involving loss of life, it remained as an example of how the organisers in the village could endanger their lives for the success of the play. For the rehearsal and training of the Prahallada Nataka, many *akhadas* remain active in the district of Ganjam. The director or the *guru* of the play was performing the role of Hiranya or the king. The *guru* used to receive golden rings, armlets, wrist bands and *kankana* as presentation from the organisers. Even the organisers were keen on taking care of the families of the directors by way of giving land grants.

Like Prahallada Nataka, Radha-Prema Lila, (or the love sportings of Radha) was another colourful theatre with lots of songs and actions.

Even if this play was not as vigorous as the Prahallada Nataka, it was replete with heart-warming episodes of love and separation. The play was therefore lucid and popular in the villages of South Orissa. *Kunja* or arbour constituted the main set in this play. It resembled a *Pidha* temple with several receding tiers. Exquisitely carved twin pillars adored the *kunja*. The stepped roof was studded with painted wooden toys of different colours and sizes. Among these toys were included inverted

parrots, resting pigeons, dancing peacocks, and birds of many varieties, monkeys, squirrels. This resembled like the *kunja* prepared in *mathas* and temples during the *Jhulana* festival. The audience used to enjoy the enactment of Radha-Prema Lila sitting around the *kunja*. Most of the time Radha out of self-conceit was seen sitting within the *kunja*, her head drooping in shame. Her eternal lover Krishna would approach Radha in various characters disguised to appease her. Although the eight legendary maids of Radha were performed by boys, their acting was superb. Krishna would come amidst the audience as a nut-



vendor to sell his nuts. Sometimes he would appear as the bangle-seller and would sell bangles to women and girls. He would fit the bangles to their wrists. Such scenes were extremely exciting and enjoyable. This play, like the Prahallada Nataka, was full of songs. Hence the characters were to learn the songs and their dialogues by heart. A character would sing the first stanza which would be chorused by the musicians and other accompanists of the group. I cite here one stanza of the lyric:

O dear, buy these bangles.
These would match your elegant wrists.
O, My darling these black bangles would
match superb
or
Why did naughty Krishna not turn up?
Why did he not come to my *kunja*
The betel leaf in my mouth turned sour
And the garland of pearls around my neck faded
Why did Shyama not come?

Though in palm leaf illustrations, Radha and other maids mostly wear *ghagaras*, still in the "Radha-Prema Lila" these characters were dressed in sarees.

Like Radha-Prema Lila, Krishna Lila is equally a theatre saturated with *Rasa*. The *Ragas* and *Raginis* used in the theatre had a Bengali accent due to the influence of Chaitanya. So each song was prolonged into various ways of presentation to consume no less than one and a half hours. For example, when Yashoda, the mother of Krishna, invited Krishna to take whey cheese, she would sing: "O my dear Kanhu, come and have your whey and cheese. Come, and have your whey and cheese." But let a mother wait so long these days either Balarama (Krishna's elder brother) or any cowherd boy would have forcibly snatched away the plate of cheese from the mother.

But during those days, the spectators immersed in the love for Krishna used to enjoy the night long performances. I distinctly remember two of the scenes of the theatre. Kaliya *dalana*

(vanquishing the snake) and *navakeli* (the boat-sport) were two very significant scenes which impressed me very much. In the scene of Kaliya *dalana*, a wooden criss-cross frame was used. To this entwined wooden frame a mask of a seven-hooded snake was fitted. Someone from the audience would push the wooden frame at Krishna. It was giving the impression that the seven-hooded snake was attempting to bite Krishna. Krishna got startled at the strange sight of the snake heading towards him with its poisonous hood. The audience took pity on the child Krishna confronting the venomous snake. They even go to the extent of uttering Alas! repetitively. These criss-crossed wooden frames were used as pegs to hang shirts and pants. Now people have forgotten its use and have replaced it by wardrobes. After biting Krishna, this wooden-framed snake would come back to its original position. Similarly in the *navakeli* scene, a boat made of bamboo rafters was hung from the shoulder. Along the bottom of the boat, a blue sari was tied. The flutter of the blue sari gave the impression of water and waves. Krishna in reality walked on the stage but it appears as though he is rowing across the river Yamuna. While acting, Krishna would be busy in conversation with the milk-maids who stood around the boat. He would be teasing these women and making fun. But the entire technicalities, I have already discussed while mentioning the Trinath Mela.

It would become a full-length book, if I begin describing all the theatre groups in Ganjam. So I will simply make a mention of the tiger dance and conclude this chapter. Earlier I have already made a mention of the tiger's dress and make-up. After returning from the Thakurani's temple, the tiger exhibits his dance. The drummers and a person holding the bait tucked to a long pole join the procession. Two persons holding bamboo sticks would accompany the group. Exact stepping, proper posture, and startled glance were the main characteristics in the tiger dance. After dancing *Tinipahula* (three-stepped dance) the tiger would take a backward look bending his neck. Somanatha, the *Mali* of our village used to perform the tiger dance extremely well. On

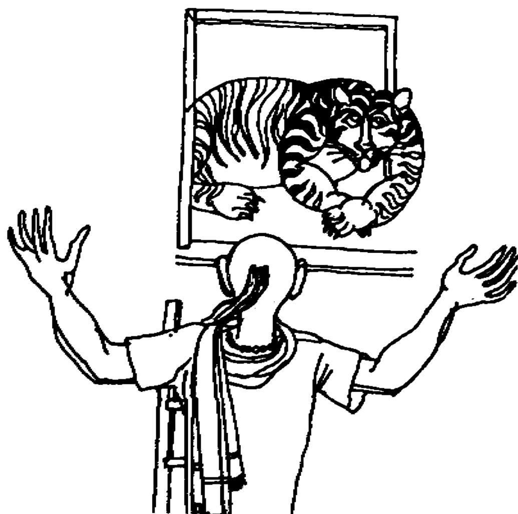
the *Badadanda* of the village, the tiger would pull a goat to himself. He would then tear it apart and drink the blood of the goat. The trunk of the goat would then be thrown at a distance of twenty feet. I began to realise that Somanatha was turning into a tiger in reality. When the tiger performed its dance on the stick, I assumed that it was in search of its prey from a mountain top. Recently I sent a person from my village to participate in Apna Utsav in New Delhi. He was a tiger-dancer. But he failed to perform the dance well. Not to speak of a man-eating tiger's dance, he even failed o dance like a wolf (*Heta bagha*). From this incident, I could conclude that the tradition of the tiger dance has lost its charm in our village. Not to mention the tiger dance, our village was famous even for a real man-eating tiger.

During my school days, on hearing the news of a tiger entering the village, the headmaster used to close the school. Senior boys of the school, big sticks in their hands, used to chase the tiger. We shut ourselves in the classrooms and peeped through the windows to watch the scene. The moment the news of a tiger entering the village spread, the whole village became alert. Holding staffs, the villagers used to chase the tiger. Only when the information of the tiger being captured and wounded reached us, we then moved from the classrooms carrying twigs, stones, sticks towards the spot where the tiger was injured. At times one or two naughty boys being too adventurous had received scratches from the tiger's nails.

Once a tiger entered the house of Kavisurya *Pandit*, who was living close to the king's palace. It was really a very interesting incident. A leopard entered the village with a view to getting heifer, dog, or hens as prey. But while in search of its prey, the day dawned. Finding no alternative, the tiger hid itself on the earthen ceiling of *Pandit's* house. It would have been better had the leopard hidden itself there all along the day. But the leopard peeped through the gap of the roof. One or two pedlars could see the leopard. They spread the news in the village. Kavisurya *Pandit* also learnt about it when he was taking a Sanskrit class in the High School. A cane in hand, he ran home ward, followed by

half the school who crowded in front of his house. The *Pandit* asked his nephew Chitta to locate the leopard, riding on a ladder. Chitta climbed up the ladder and discovered the leopard lying on one corner of the ceiling exactly like a cat. Chitta came down the ladder and declared that it was merely a cat. But our *Pandit* got annoyed with him as he had confirmed from the voices ringing in the crowd that it was a tiger. His pigtail got unfurled and fluttered in the wind like Chanakya's pigtail. Anger-torn, he climbed up the ladder, folding his *dhoti* up to the knees. Reaching the threshould of the ceiling, he lost his wits. All of a sudden, he yelled, "No, no, Chitta, it is not a cat. It's a tiger. It is staring at me with blank eyes." Uttering these words, he became nervous and withdrew his supporting hands from the ladder. As a result, he fell down. Had the crowd not caught the ladder, *Pandit* would have surely met his end. After this incident he broke his limbs. With the help of a stick he could walk and move.

Neither the leopard of Kavisurya *Pandit's* ceiling nor the tiger of the Thakurani *Jatra* is seen in the village. All believe and say that the village has been urbanised and how can there be any tiger?



THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION

During my school days, art education was considered to be inferior to engineering and medical science. Both the educated and the uneducated held this view. They believed that easy ways of earning big money were with the engineering and medical professions. Such possibilities were limited in any other profession. The villagers believed that art education was useless, as one could merely become a drawing teacher. The profession of drawing teacher was heinous and hated by the villagers. They firmly believed that those who failed in examinations or those who were weak students in studies or academically not sound, only they could study art and choose to become drawing teacners. My well-wishers took it for granted that I would never choose to accept art as my profession, as I was a good student and as there was no possibility of my failure in the examination.

Whenever any engineer visited our village, the only question that kept ringing in the ears of the villagers was: what was the salary? How much was the extra income? People even believed that an overseer could pocket some amount from the construction of buildings. So they preferred their children to become at least overseers. Although I had a deep passion for art education, I had dreamt of becoming an engineer, and that was why I had mathematics as my optional subject in the matriculation. But my *Bhaina* used to say that I would have my art education in Calcutta like Sitakant Mahapatra of Chikiti Gada; or like Gopal Pattanaik of our village. *Bhaina* was urging my art education from a purely commercial perspective. He believed that after my professional training as an artist, I would be in a position to assist him in managing and maintaining the family. He was totally justified in having such a view. In fact, I

could help him in my childhood to earn something extra, being a junior artist under his able stewardship.

Whatever one dreams with heart's intent, it may not come true all of a sudden; but it certainly happens sooner or later. I had this realisation much later. During my matriculation, my father died. I did not have the good luck to be present beside my father when he passed away. It was the festive time of *Dashara*. I had been to Pudamari to decorate O.R.T. (Orissa Road Transport) buses. Although my father had been ailing, he was fully recovered when I set out for Pudamari. What happened to him no one knows. But all of a sudden he passed away. *Bhaina* was called back from Berhampur. But nobody bothered to remember me then. The following day was *Dashara*, and I was coming back from Pudamari on a bus, decorated like a swan. It was a clamorous and joyous *Dashara* dawn. As I got down from the bus, a friend of mine pointed out to me the pyre burning in the distance. My father was the only source of love, affection, hopes and secuirty for me. With my slightest artistic achievement, he used to feel elated. After this sad piece of information, it seemed to me that the world had become empty for me. The sky of woe and anguish had torn on me and the earth beneath my feet had been withdrawn. On arriving home, I discovered my mother in the corner sitting like a stone. Drawing me unto her lap and touching my head, she mumbled, her voice choked beyond recognition: "Your *Nana* (father) is no more." The trail of tears from my granny's deep-set eyes had already withered. She was feeling quite helpless, losing her son at the age of eighty. What a strange strategy of time and tyranny of destiny! She felt as helpless as a blind person losing her staff. I had no course to render any kind of consolation to them. How would I console myself, I could not know. I could not decide what to do. It is the first cold unkind touch of death for me. But that this event would be more tragic and painful to our family, I never could imagine. After the demise of my father, the cloud of poverty came crowding in on our family. I fell ill, soon after. My body was covered with scabies. Like a leper I was isolated. My friends kept

away from me. They teased me calling a *karusilpi* (artist of scabies). Six months before the matriculation examination, I got no scope to prepare myself for it. It was not possible for me to deposit the examination fees on time. The then in charge Headmaster, Sanatan Pujari showed me the way to earn money. I had to prepare charts for two C.T. schools. Amid such darkening clouds, I could get the sign of lightning when my friend Narasingha Tarasia invited me to their house to prepare myself for the examination. Tarasia had already failed in the examination more than six or seven times. So he expected that if I would be with him in his house, I might take care of his studies and help him.

My primary attraction in staying in Narashingha's house was two good meals. I don't know what miracle did happen or whose good luck it was that made Narasingha pass that year. Everyone in the village began to gossip that it was because of me Narashingha could pass. But I could not secure good marks. My teachers used to say that I would rank among the first ten. But in reality, I could not even secure a first division. I got a second division. This downfall became a boon for me. This memorable incident diverted my attention towards art. Had I then studied engineering, surely I would have become an executive engineer by now, lost completely in the heaps of cement bags and sand or forgotten underneath the melting tins of pitch, on some national highway. I was saved by the downfall. My second division in the matriculation examination contributed greatly to the realisation of my dream. I could not make it to receive a scholarship from the government. My friend, Nilakantha got a scholarship and was admitted to the Khallikote College, Berhampur. Within ten to fifteen days of my admission there, I had to make a retreat to my village because of acute poverty. During my short sojourn in Berhampur, I took care of the accounts in a hotel owned by Khalli Gouda, a freedom fighter of our village. He used to supply drinking water and tea to the members on the dais at political meetings, visited by Harekrishna Mahatab, Biswanath Das, the then renowned Congress Party leaders. Such services to the

political stalwarts made him a political leader. He was very kind to come forward to help students like me. Amid the noise and clamour of Khalli Gouda's hotel, my hope of studying science could not thrive long. I did blame not anyone, not even Khalli Gouda. Whenever I happen to meet him these days in front of a Minister's residence or office in Bhubaneswar, my hands automatically go up to offer my salutations to him. These days, Khalli Gouda has engaged himself in serving the cause of the nation and people. This amazes me even today. Khalli Gouda's hotel no longer exists in Berhampur. But one has to acknowledge that many meritorious students have emerged as doctors and engineers from the clamour of that hotel.

1958. Appearing at the matriculation examination then was a great event. It is still fresh in my memory like any other historical event. There was no examination centre in our village. Sanatan Pujari, the Assistant Headmaster, used to lead the team of examiners from our school to Berhampur. A house was arranged in advance on rent to accommodate the students during the period of examination. A cook accompanied us. All the necessary items such as groceries, rice and vegetables were also purchased for the purpose. Every morning our Pujari Sir waited for an auspicious moment, before the students left for the examination hall. It was his belief that if the students set out for the examination hall after viewing an overflowing pitcher (of water), or a calf accompanying a cow, then the students would get easy questions and would fare well in the examination. Neither was it possible to see a calf accompanying a cow, nor a full pitcher of water in Berhampur town. On the other hand, there were many empty pitchers beneath the Municipality tap. When a lady, filling her pitcher from the tap, reached our temporary rented abode, Pujari Sir would give his clarion call for us to make the move. In spite of Sanatan Sir's trials to seize auspicious moments, students failed from our school. I was compelled to appear at the examination in spite of my illness. Sanatan Sir loved me very much. Spending from his own pocket, he did take care of my early recovery. He used to inspire me to write well in the

examination by offering me chocolates. The doctor who treated me was informed by Sir that I was a good artist and that on my recovery I would pay back his fees in kind, by presenting him with a few portraits.

Our results were published in the newspaper. Ramanarayan Padhi, Headmaster, Sanatan Sir, Andarpu Satyanarayan Sir, all were taken aback by my result. They could never believe that I secured a second division. On the verandah of Satyanarayan Sir, a small meeting was conducted. After the discussion at the meeting, it was decided that surely because of wrong tabulation my division was so low. So it was decided further that someone would go to Cuttack to investigate the matter. An estimate of expenditure to be incurred for this purpose was made. As I was the target of everyone's sympathy, I agreed to their proposal. In order to meet the expenses to be incurred, I proposed to melt the three gold medals presented to me by the Ganjam District Drawing Master's Association. Selling the gold, the expenses could be met. Pocketing three gold medals, I reached the shop of Satyambawa, the goldsmith. Satyambawa took the medals from me and looked at them. Then he looked at me pityingly. He had no words. Yet I could assume what he intended to say: "Do the gold medals carry any amount of gold?"

THE SANSKRIT TOLL OF ODASINGI

Because of poverty I could not continue my study of science at Khallikote College, Berhampur. Coming back to my village, I thought it would not be difficult to get the job of a teacher in a Primary School or M.E. School. I submitted an application in our village Primary School to become a teacher. I could not get the job. Someone who had failed in the matriculation examination was given the appointment. Finding no hope, from any quarters, I began tuition on the verandah of Balaji *matha*. A host of fools and truant boys enlisted their names. Half of the tuition boys were not regular. I could not say any harsh words to anyone lest the tuition might be closed down. In spite of my attempts, the tuition centre could not thrive. Neighbours and relatives began to shoot many questions at me. I could not even move freely in the market. I was at my wit's end. I thought I would try to get the job of a teacher in the neighbouring schools around my village. I did not have a bicycle. Nor did I know how to ride it. So, offering tiffin worth two to four annas to my friends, I requested them to go to different villages carrying me on their cycle. Going around four villages, I learnt that at Odasingi Sanskrit Toll, the post of an English teacher was lying vacant. Odasingi is four kilometres away from my village, on the way to Chikiti Gada. Crossing many rice fields, village markets, groves, and graveyards, through Padmanabhapur Pentha and via Kanheipur one could reach Odasingi.

No sign of beard on my face when I passed matriculation. The *Mahanta* of Odasingi Toll enquired: "Sir, you don't even have a beard on your face. How much salary would you take per month?" *Mahanta's* appearance was sleek and glossy like the *Salagam* stone. Bald-headed. A tuft of pigtail at the back. Three

tier *tulsi*-necklace pressing on to his neck. Broad betel-nut-bedecked lips. He was around forty. Dressed in superfine *dhoti* and yellow thin towel. Renouncing the *Samsara* he became a *Mahanta*. But he seemed to be passionately involved in the affairs of the *Samsara*, more than that of a worldly man who has not renounced family ties. His face concealed the yearnings of a lover. The *tilak* mark was spread above the forehead. I came to know that he was the the all-in-all of the Sanskrit Toll, and the owner of the *Matha*. Among the uneducated *Padhans* and *Reddikas*, the *Mahanta* was considered to be the only educated, learned and wise and respectable man. He readily agreed to pay me thirty rupees in cash, and vegetables worth ten rupees per month. In the *Matha* there was no scarcity of paddy, rice and *dal*, yet for the *Mahanta* ready cash was important. So the *Mahanta* had told me, in case of no difficulty, he would pay me the salary in kind, if not in cash. Whether the conditions prescribed by the *Mahanta* were acceptable to me, it was beyond my capabilities to debate on. So, I came back to my village, accepting the offer. This was my first Government job. Afterwards, I came to know that the Government sanctioned forty-nine rupees. Deducting nineteen rupees for himself, the *Mahanta* agreed to make a payment of thirty rupees per month.

As the news of my appointment spread in the villages many friends began to advise me. Balaji Raju's son Teji (Tejeswar Raju, at present Lipton Tea Agent at Jajpur Road) sold to me his elder brother, Ramanath Raju's a pair of full pants and a pair of full shirts at only five rupees and a pair of shoes at two rupees for his tiffin expenses. I was told that a teacher had to use full pants, full shirt and full shoes. These were the first full pants of my life. Putting on full pants, full shirt and full shoes, I set out for Odasingi Sanskrit Toll. On the way, it rained heavily. I thought, viewing my dress and make-up, even nature could not forebear. Everyday I set out for Odasing at about 9.30 in the morning and reached the school at 11.30 a.m. As a facade to the *Matha* there were two rows of thatched houses. The verandahs of these houses were deliberately made very high, lest the shadows of the



untouchables might fall on the *Pandits*. These verandahs were a foot higher than me. On these verandahs, boys older than me by fifteen to twenty years, used to practise Sanskrit *slokas* and grammar. They were clad in a knee-high *dhoti*, a towel on the shoulder, and the streaming white sacred thread. This was the kind of dress my students were using. Seeing me approaching toward the verandah, they would shout, "O, the Sir has come."

I was afraid of those students. Passing the verandah I rushed into the *Matha* to meet the *Mahanta*. He would be seated on a colonial period wooden chair, nicely turned and carved. Lifting his legs in a vulgar posture he would be seated. After my respectful salutations, he would ask me to join them in *Pangata* (dining). I was a Brahmin. After walking down four kilometres, all that I consumed must have been digested. So, I had no hesitation to join them. The dining scene was very interesting. In one corner of the open verandah of the *Matha*, the *Mahanta* would be sitting on a wooden stool in lotus posture, his huge belly bulging out. On either side of the *Mahanta*, the *Bikilia* (voracious) students would be seated. The junior *Pandit* and I occupied our seats beside the *Mahanta*. For the *Mahanta* banana leaves and for us ordinary leaves which constituted plates were served. The cook began to serve the *Mahanta*. Every student heaped rice to the tune of one to two kilograms on their leaves which had the look of a pyramid. *Mahanta's* heaped rice was no less than that of the students. Almost eighty per cent of *mung dal* would be given to the *Mahanta*. Out of the remaining twenty per cent we were given five per cent and the rest of the students were getting fifteen per cent. At last the cook sprayed *mung dal* on the leaf plates of the students. About ten to fifteen varieties of curry and fry were served to the *Mahanta*. Teachers were served with one or two items of curry. For the students was left only *charu* (a liquid prepared out of tamarind juice) and arum fry. The poor Brahmins who came from different Brahmin *Sasana* (villages) were tired of getting the *slokas* by heart all through the morning. Their stomachs would be burning with hunger. The moment they were served with rice and *charu*, their mouths began to

salivate. On the banana-leaf plate of the *Mahanta*, the priest would pour almost 250 grams of ghee. Students could inhale the scent of the ghee. But alas! not a drop to taste. A drop or two of ghee falls on the plate of the junior *Pandit*. The moment the *Mahanta* lifted his handful of rice to his mouth after uttering three to four *slokas*, the students would leap on to their leaves. Within no time, the leaves of the students would go empty. The cook anxiously awaited to serve the *Mahanta* for the second time. Throwing away a handful of rice here and there, the cook would preserve the rest for himself. After a full-bellied meal, the *Mahanta* would release air through his mouth. By then the attendant would be ready with the brass pouch to prepare betel-nut. When the *Mahanta* sat on the wooden stool, the cook would offer him the betel-nut. After pressing a betel-nut behind his cheek, he would offer a few suggestions to the students. Then he would climb up the stairs. That was the time for *Mahanta's* mid-day nap. One or two handsome, healthy boys would follow him. Others would begin to laugh. I could not know in the beginning the meaning of their soft laughter. But later on learnt that even if the *Mahanta* was a bachelor and had renounced all familial bondages, the innocent students became the victims of his passion. After knowing this fact, my respect for the *Mahanta* waned. During the absence of the *Mahanta*, the students would not be interested in their studies. After teaching English and mathematics for one hour, I used to return to my village. But I developed fear within for the *Mahanta*. So I advised the students to inform the *Mahanta* if he made any query after his midday nap that I did leave the toll just then. After the heavy meal, the Brahmin boys felt very sleepy. The entire village of Odasingi came under the spell of a stupor during the midday. The junior *Pandit*, after pressing the snuff beneath his lips, would lie down on the verandah to straighten his waist. So there was no difficulty for me to escape the toll.

On the pay day I never walked upto Odasingi. I would take a friend to drive me up to the Toll on his bicycle, for I would have to come to the village carrying my salary. At times when the

Mahanta paid my salary in kind, such as *mung dal,* rice paddy, etc., three or four students accompanied me carrying all these items. During the year-long service in the Sanskrit Toll, at Odasingi, I must have gone there only for four to five months. The rest of the time I spent in the village or I had gone out of my village with *Bhaina* for the appointed assignments of *Silpakala Mandir*. Once I stayed away from the Toll without applying for leave for about a month and a half. *Bhaina* proposed that I should paint the portrait of the old *Mahanta*. On a full sheet drawing paper the portrait was drawn with the help of a pencil, under the guidance of *Bhaina*. After mounting and glass-framing, the portrait had a large-sized look. The junior *Pandit* and the students looked at me startled. On *Mahanata's* wish, a meeting was convened that day. Many important persons of the villages were sent for. The *Mahanta* appreciated my portrait. Looking at the portrait of the old *Mahanta,* his eyes were flooded with tears. The village chiefs, the junior *Pandit* and my students offered their salutations to the old *Mahanta* by bowing down their heads. The *Mahanta* crowned me with the new *dhoti* from the store of the *Matha*. The core within got excited, elated. My hitherto pent up hatred for *Mahanta* melted away. In my eyes the *Mahanta* remained a connoisseur of art. I could treasure that moment of Odasingi within the deep recesses of my heart for the future years to come.

A FEW CHARACTERS OF MY VILLAGE

A host of uncles, cousins, *Bhainas* and friends were closely associated with me in many memorable incidents during those bygone days of Digapahandi. In course of my narration, I have said informally many things about them. It won't be possible to depict them here. I record here a few individuals with whom I was extremely intimate and close.

Gokul Chandra Mekap and Kishore Chandra Pasupalak lived in the middle of our street. They were the sons of Sitaram Pasupalak. Much before he had breathed his last. These three characters were exquisitely colourful. Gokul *Bhaina's* title was changed from Pasupalak to Mekap as he was given on adoption to another family. Mekap and Pasupalak abridged from Puspalaka were two traditional titles. Hereditarily they were the Changada Mekap and Puspalaka *sevakas*. Since the day I last saw them, they did not have any connection either with the temple or the palace. Even these days, Chanagada Mekap and Puspalaka are working as servitors in the Lord Jagannatha temple at Puri. Gokul Chandra Mekap was neither too tall nor too short. Quasi-dark skinned. Two streaming moustaches beneath the nose that gave the impression of a running nose. Hitler and Mussolini did have such moustaches, which were known as French-cut moustaches in our village. Gokul *Bhaina* was extremely intelligent. He was well versed in the *Vedas* and *Vedantas*. He used to speak very good English and hence he was respected in the village by the educated boys. He was a close disciple of Swami Sivananda Saraswati. He could articulate Swamiji's preachings. Everyday he used to lead a team of village boys on an evening walk. Nilakantha, my friend, and I accompanied him in the evening walk. He could deliver lectures in English fluently

during the evening walk. As though, the smoke was emitted through a train engine. Startled, we looked up at his face. At times we failed to comprehend the meaning of difficult words and we enjoyed inhaling the flavour of alien nectar. He used to take a half mile walk to complete one sentence. Once he articulated a sentence, it was prolonged like the resonance of the thunderbolt in summer. We were studying then in Class VIII or IX. So it was difficult on our part to understand those bombasts. But all the way like hymn-charmed snakes we used to look at him, following him. I cite here a part of Gakul *Bhaina's* speech:

> "Heart is God. God is ominpresent, omniscient, omnipotent, all-pervading will, contentment, all happiness, light of lights, a supramental state of superconsciousness beyond the reach of human reasoning, human endeavour, etc."

Swami Vivekananda could not have used such bombasts to explain the presence of God during his lecture in Chicago city,



Gokul *Bhaina* must have known intimately about God, otherwise how could he be só vocal in his view about God?

He was an active member of the Divine Life Society. But he was above the rules and regulations which were meant for the ordinary members of the society. He used to inspire us to maintain a spiritual diary. Whenever we enquired about anything relating to the spiritual diary, unhesitatingly he gave answers. I cite below some of his valuable explanations.

1. I never leave my bed after the *Brahma muhurta.*
2. Whenever I meet somebody, I considered it as *Satsanga,* good company. So, what is the use of writing down how much time I spent in my *Satsanga.* company of good friends.
3. I tell nothing beyond truth. So how many lies I told would be meaningless to enquire or present.

Gokul *Bhaina* was not saying anything useless or incongruous. All his words appeared to us as truthful. We held him in high esteem as an intelligent and wise man. So when *Bhaina* did not have his half-bath after excretion, we felt very awkward. When asked, he would explain: "To excrete means to purge the body of dirt." In other words, to become pure (body–dirt=pure body). So what is the use of the half-bath? On the other hand, he used to argue that one must have a bath after dining; for him body + food (dirt)=impure body. With the intake of food the excretion or ordure gets formed in the body. Even though *Bhaina* was married, he led the life of a *Brahmachari,* (celibacy) staying away from his family in Paichha *Matha.* During my matriculation examination, I used to stay beside his residence. He used to solve all problems by his self-invented formula. I remember when I was studying geometry he would like to know what exactly I was doing. When I was solving the analysis of the fourth theorum, he would explain that all the problems were based on the theorum. So sound knowledge of the theorum was the prerequisite for solving the analysis. He would then try to explain the therum to me. Theorums were explained in the

geometry book. But the analysis by Gokul *Bhaina*, could bring no solution.

Gokul *Bhaina* has interfered in many plans. Barring one or two occasions, there was no sign of success. He has experimented on religion, English literature, publication of books, organisation, advocacy, politics, etc.

It is true that Gokul *Bhaina* was an intelligent, tradition-conscious and wise man. So most of the villagers misunderstood him. When I was studying in the school, he organised a Cultural Week in the Girls' High School. Inviting many wise and educated individuals he made the programme a success. On the concluding day of the week, he delivered a lecture on "The Ferocity of Atomic Power." I do not exactly remember what he said. But for more than one and a half an hours he delivered the lecture brilliantly. Three-fourths of the educated and wise audience could not comprehend his lecture. He was worried like Gorbachev and Bush of our times. Even if there was no trace of atomic energy in Digaphandi, *Bhaina* was worried about the problem almost thirty to thirty-five years ago. We did not understand anything from his lecture, yet we sat there amazed by the erudition and fluency of his speech.

Gokul *Bhaina* established, "Viswa Sanskruti Parishad" in our village with a view to bringing back global peace and inspiring people to be conscious of their own cultural heritage. He enrolled me as an active member of this organisation. On behalf of this organisation, we organised many meetings at Digapahandi and at surrounding villages. Once we had been to Chanchadapalli to conduct a meeting. *Bhaina* was the chief-guest. I was the co-organiser. Two or three boys from our village were the light-bearers. The topic of the meeting was "Universal Brotherhood through Language." At Chanchadapalli, fifty per cent of the population were milkmen, goatherds and cowherds, Their spoken language was a mixture of Oriya and Telugu. The rest of the population was farmers, and they were known as Padhan. Their acquaintance and intimacy were with the cultivable land, field, and cultivation. The terms like "Universe" and

"Brotherhood" were quite strange to them. These were as strange as the heaven for them. It was *Bhaina* who organised the meeting. On the open space at Radhagovinda *Matha*, the meeting was conducted. One or two cowherd boys studied in our school then. They were the chief organisers. Petromax lights were arranged. Seeing the light decoration, the naughty vagabond boys came in thronging like the swarms of insects. Slowly the elderly men of the village gathered over there. In total fifty to sixty people assembled. At the advice and suggestion of *Bhaina*, I delivered the introductory speech, introducing *Bhaina* and the organisation to the public. Following my introduction, Gokul *Bhaina* began his speech like the flood waters in the rainy season. No one could understand him in Digapahandi. So who would understand his lecture at Chanchadapalli? Some started dozing and yawning. Some left the meeting. As the organiser I could recollect this much that Gokul *Bhaina* had a broad understanding of different languages. He had a real weakness for Sanskrit. He organised the meeting to legitimise the status of Sanskrit as a national language. But he was equally sceptical about the "Balakau." He advocated the removal of double person from the Sanskrit vocabulary. If Sanskrit was made the national language or the international language, not only would we revive the lost glory of India and enhance prestige, but the health of the people could be easily improved. If Sanskrit would be made the global language then all would leave their beds early in the dawn and would practise the Sanskrit word structures so that all would become healthy. In order to wake up at dawn, people would require alarm clocks. For manufacturing alarm clocks we would need the technical assistance of Switzerland to install a watch factory (during those days the HMT factory in Bangalore was not established). We would then get immense satisfaction. Such arguments seemed to be incongruous to some people. But would it be incongruous to consider Sanskrit as the national language?

Gokul *Bhaina* opened a homoeopathy clinic at Digapahandi market in order to serve the cause of the people. At that time *Bhaina's* name was Gokul Chandra Mekap, M.A., M.D.M.S.H.

(Homoeo). We were all surprised. He used to be very close to us. When did he complete such courses? It is not that *Bhaina's* prescribed medicines did not cure anyone. But he had a special emotion in his practice as a doctor. He intended to serve the people. Working round the clock my own *Bhaina* fell sick and he had to go to Gokul *Bhaina's* clinic. Hearing about the disease, Gokul *Bhaina* said, "Lokanath *Bhaina*, you need not keep yourself awake during the night. You can work as well during the day time and rest during the night. Your sickness would disappear and you would be cured."

In order to expand the scope of rendering service to people, he leaped into the fray of the election on behalf of Ganatantra Parishad. My *Bhaina*, Martha Sir, and I prepared leaflets, posters, stencils for his electioneering. All said that Gokul *Bhaina* was a wise man. Such people should take an active role in politics. But after the counting, it was known that he was defeated miserably by his nearest rival. Most probably he lost his deposit. Of course much before, in the ward member election he had also been defeated.

If I go on talking about Gokul *Bhaina* it would become a huge book. I respect him and love him very much. So let the readers not feel that whatever I have said about Gokul *Bhaina* was deliberate or was punctuated by any interior motif. Yes, without making a mention of one or two incidents relating to Gokul *Bhaina*, I would not be able to conclude my portraiture of him. When a Primary Health Centre was set up many new doctors visited our village. One or two of them began to advise the villagers on proteinous and vitaminous food. They presented the list from whatever they had read in theory. People began to mumble only "vitamin, vitamin." It was not that they did not know anything about vitamins from the science books. But when the doctors prescribed vitaminous food, the villagers were totally confused. The villagers lived on starch and spinach. The vitamins prescribed by the doctors baffled them. Gokul *Bhaina* came to know about the confusion of the villagers. He arranged a meeting in front of the Lions' gate of the palace to eradicate the

doubts about vitamins. Many questions were asked and answered. In the long run, *Bhaina* put forth a challenge to remove the doubts about vitamins from the minds of the villagers. "I would cut an apple or grape. If the doctors would identify the vitamins from these cut-fruits, then there would be no difficulty in accepting the views of the doctors." The villagers could conclude that there was no difference between cutting an apple and cutting a pumpkin or brinjal. Then what else was the vitamin? Naughty boys of the villages shouted, "O' he is mad. These are nothing but the seeds," and all the people in the meeting began to laugh. The context of vitamins ended up in bubbles. Once *Bhaina* had to file a case in the court. Without taking the help of any advocate, he decided to plead his own case. The magistrate did not agree to his proposal in the beginning. *Bhaina* presented his argument with such intelligence that the magistrate had no other alternative but to accept his proposal. He pleaded his own case and had won it. These days, *Bhaina* was very active at Digapadhandi.

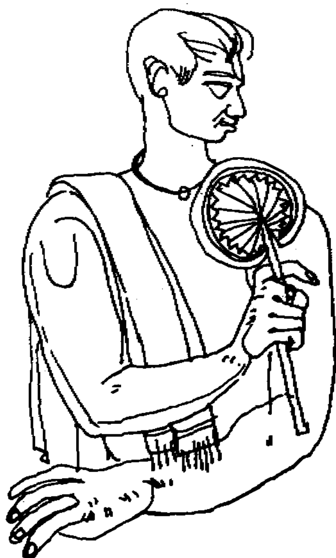
Let us now come to Kishore Chandra Pasupalak. He was so much older than us that we called him Kishore *Bhaina*. He did not have much education. Perhaps, he was a Matriculate. I don't remember if he did passs B.A. Even if he was older than all of us, he was very close to us. Three of his proposals for the improvement of the village were really innovative. One of the proposals was a little vulgar. So I do not make mention of it here. Of the other two proposals one was about the elephant and the other was about the college. During those days there had been much discussion regarding the establishment of a college at Digapahandi. People were keenly collecting donations, conducting meetings. Kishore *Bhaina* did not involve himself in these affairs. He used to speak to us of a new proposal regarding the establishment of a college. The proposal would seem to be like a granny's tale. In the west of our village there is the Changudidei mountain. The Mendhadhimira hill would appear quite small before this mountain. Krupamaya Dev left a temple incomplete on this Mendhadhimira hill. Stretching one's eyes to



the western horizon of Digapahandi, one could see the incomplete, half-built temple on the hill. If the villagers would sanction him an elephant on the hill, *Bhaina* would move round the villages first. He did not have any objection if three to four persons would accompany him on the back of the elephant. In every village he would declare that Lord Venkataswara had appeared in his dream and said that if the half-completed temple on Mendhadhimira would not be completed within a year, then the people in the nearby villages would collapse.

The villagers would then offer clothes, rice, paddy, etc. The

elephant being a vegetarian could thrive on leaves and branches of the trees. The persons who accompanied him could take their guest meals in the nearby villages and *mathas*. So without incurring any expenditure, they could collect a heavy amount in cash or kind and everything could be brought back to the village by the elephant. Then investing this money the temple could be built. The elephant who collected money, paddy, rice, etc would be used to carry bags of cement, sand and stones to the hill so that the construction could be continued. There would be no difficulty in completing the construction work of the temple. After the construction, steps would be made to reach the temple. Then the deity would be installed. After the installation, the deity would once again appear in a dream. All the *Kumutis* (the business class people) in and around the village would be sent post cards. In the letter it would be mentioned that according to Lord Venkateswara (who appeared in the dream) they must donate a large amount or else they would die and their sons would be bitten by snakes. Both inside and outside the temple huge pots or boxes for collecting donations would be placed. After a year, more than a lakh of rupees could be collected this way. Then there would be no difficulty in constructing the college building. If this proposal could bear any fruit, then the Mendhadhimira hill would be converted into a famous tourist spot. The elephant need not come back to the village. The elephant could now be used to carry foreign tourists to the temple and could get them back to the foot of the hills. There would be no scarcity of finance. Out of daily collections, payment could be made to the lecturers. Kishore *Bhaina's* proposal seemed to be excellent to us. Of course long after I left the village, the college was established. But the pioneers did not accept Kishore *Bhaina's* proposal. Kishore *Bhaina's* second proposal was that of setting up of a hotel on the seashore of Gopalpur. During that period, Lingaraj Panigrahi, the Education Minister, visited our village in a Mercedes car. We were amazed at the sight of such a long sleek car. Looking at the car, Kishore *Bhaina* thought of having a hotel at Gopalpur. The hotel would be three-storeyed.



Two storeys would be under the ground, and one storey above. Surrounding the building, there would be a vast sprawling greenness of casuarina trees. The building would be indistinctly visible through the gap of the trees. An armed sentry would guard the gate. His moustache must be like Hiranya's. In case of any visitor's arrival at the gate, the sentry would urgently accost him by his salute and then he would open the iron gate. Kishore Chandra Adhikari, one of our friends, would officiate as the Manager. He would be tidy in his dress, neat and trim with suit and coat. During our school days, Kishore Adhikari had a good personality. So the role of a manager would fit him. My duty would be to prepare the signboards, colour the doors and windows, and to keep the hotel in an elegant style. In the hotel three to four black cars like the car of Lingaraj Panigrahi would be parked. These cars would be kept in a good condition. During the night, these cars would make a run towards Taptapani. The smuggled wood would be seized. The owners of the trucks

would be penalised and be asked to pay a heavy compensation. If necessity arose, these smugglers would be imprisoned in the basement of the hotel. Or if necessary, they would be murdered in the darkness of the jungle of Taptapani. Then surely the police would come to know about the murder and we would be arrested. Kishore *Bhaina* did not mind anything. Hearing about murder, our hearts began to beat faster. It appeared to us then that Kishore *Bhaina*, after reading a a detective novel could transfer the entire plot to suit our village atmosphere. Changing the names of the characters, he employed new characters of the village to perpetuate the plot. Of course, had he tried, *Bhaina* could have easily constructed a hotel at Gopalpur. He had no difficulties in terms of finance and convenience. A few days ago when I visited my village, I saw that he had erected a cinema hall at the crossing of *Punjikayan*. That is the first cinema hall in Digaphandi. But most probably there is no underground hall beneath the cinema hall.

Satyabadi Pujari was another unforgettable character of our village. His house was situated in Annapurna street, almost four to five houses beyond Martha Sir's tuition hall.

Satyabadi Pujari was an expert musician. He used to sing *Champu, Choupadi* excellently. He knew the art of book-binding. He spent the afternoon on the stairs leading to Martha Sir's tuition centre. A palm-leaf fan on his hand. He would be using this fan in summer as well as in winter. He was descended from an aristocratic family and hence he consumed a good quantity of ghee. So his appearance was glossy and shining. But when Satyabadi Pujari took up the charge of the family, the financial position was at the lowest ebb. Yet he would not feel contented without ghee on his plate. "A meal without ghee was a bad meal," he believed. The ghee was preserved in a small container which was kept within a big one. In olden ancestral days, the ghee pot treasured a silver spoon. These days, he used to get the ghee from the container with the help of a piece of broken glass and he would nestle the piece of broken glass on the heaped rice to collect ghee. Only with the flavour of ghee, the rice-ball could be easily swallowed.

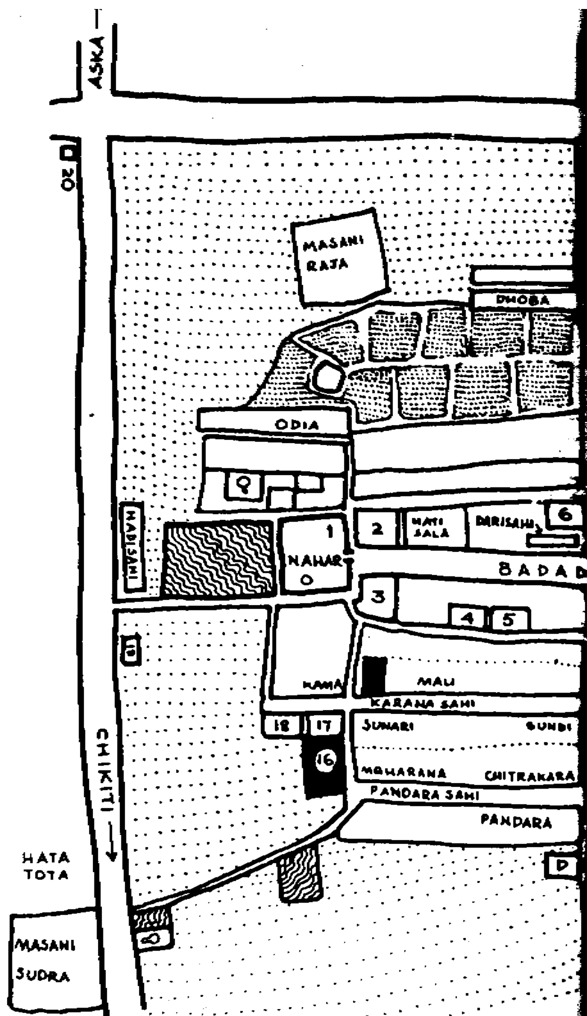
In spite of marrying several times, he was a widower. Satyabadis' horoscope predicted that no wife would survive with him and Subas was his only son. Perhaps because of extreme affection from his father, he could not pass the matriculation. Sitting on the verandah of the tuition centre, he would be often calling out "O' Subas, O' my dear Subas!"

He used to narrate the ancestral glory of his royal heritage. He would narrate how in the past, his ancestors were preparing sweets out of pure ghee. He would be sceptical about the degeneration that had gone into their family. The pure ghee had been substituted by *Dalda*. Looking at his body one could easily assume that pure ghee has contributed immensely to the blood in his views. He had then become extremely thin. Sickly appearance. Because of philaria, his feet had swollen. He was maintaining his family by book-binding and harmonium-mending. He was associated with the *Shilpakala Mandir*. He was every inch an artist—even if a minor one—this fact could never be unacknowledged.

While narrating other incidents, I have already made a mention of other characters of my village. My aim is not to repeat the same here and now. Broadly speaking, Digapahandi was then a culture-conscious, art-loving typical *odia* village. There was no dearth of musicians, artists, poets and writers who resuscitated the cultural heritage of this village.

I was greatly influenced by the epical and artistic atmosphere of the village in multiple ways. I was even influenced profoundly by these unforgettable artistic personalities. Although the names of such personalities have not been recorded in the history of this nation, yet they would be remembered long at Digapahandi and by me. In the context of Digapahandi and the drawing teacher, their memories haunt me and inspire me wherever I am, leaving an indelible impression.

They reappear, as though they are alive now; I feel those personalities intimately within me. The lost dimension of that little village has become a part of this drawing master of Digapahandi. Sometimes, when I turn the pages of the past, I recollect them passionately and aspire to get lost in them.



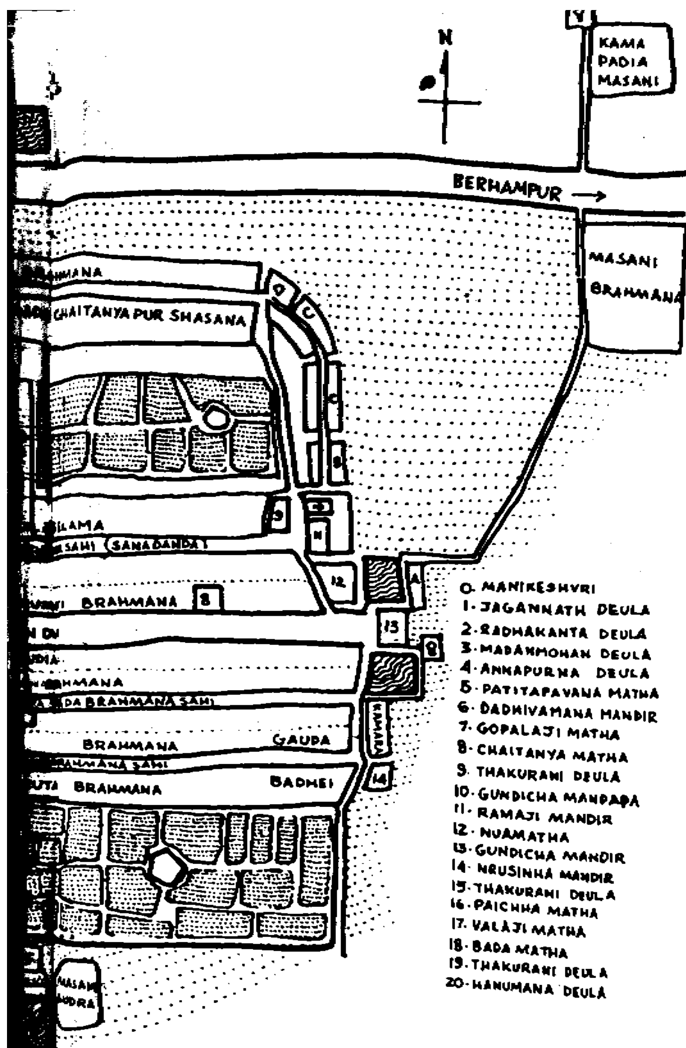
bila, Felder

bada, Garten

bandha, Teiche

matha, Tempelheime

sivi mandira, Siva-Tempel



36 Stadtplan von Digapahandi (Ganjam-D.)

A *mochi sahi*, Schusterstrasse
B *kumbhara sahi*, Topferstrasse
C *bauri sahi*, Feldarbeiterstrasse
D *patana ghara*, Hauser der Schlachter



Dinanath Pathy. b. 1942. Started career as a muralist and theatre curtain painter in South Orissa. Later obtained Govt. Diploma in Fine Arts from School of Art and Crafts, Khallikote, Orissa. Got first Ph.D in History from Utkal University and second Ph.D in Art History from Visva Bharati, Shantiniketan. Received President of India Silver Plaque for painting (AIFACS, 1988) and A.L. Basham Memorial Award for creative research. Held several posts viz. Curator of Art and Crafts, Orissa State Museum, Principal, B.K. College of Art and Crafts, Bhubaneswar. Already published 20 titles in Oriya, English, German. Co-author and Co-Editor to Dr. Eberhard Fischer, Director, Museum Rietberg, Switzerland. Curated several national and international exhibitions, visualiser of national and international festivals. Practising Painter, Designer, Illustrator, Writer and Art Historian.

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